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Homo Sum: The Metaphysical Anthropology of Liberalism

Honors Thesis

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By

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Homo Sum: The Metaphysical Anthropology of Liberalism

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Abstract: This study takes a critical look at the work of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in relation to Patrick Deneen's first anthropological assumption of Liberalism, presented in his book, *Why Liberalism Failed*. Deneen claims that Liberalism conceives of human persons as naturally separate and nonrelational. Man is not a ζῷον πολιτικόν (*Politikon Zoon* or Political animal) in Liberalism. Human persons are not the kinds of being that thrive in interpersonal relationships but are by nature isolated and come together for limited self-interested purposes. The main work of this paper includes an attempt to flesh out Hobbes', Locke's, and Rousseau's ideas about human nature in a way that accurately represents the nuances of their positions. This paper finds that, while Deneen is correct in some ways, he is incorrect in others and has missed the subtlety and intricacy of these three thinkers in the tradition of Liberalism. This paper also attempts, in the terms of phenomenological personalist philosophy, to draw attention to the failures of the Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The conclusion of this paper is that while Deneen's critique of Liberalism cannot be fully endorsed neither can the metaphysical anthropology of Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau be fully endorsed, despite Liberalism's noble ambitions.

Keywords and phrases: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Liberalism, Metaphysical Anthropology, Personalism

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Introduction: Deneen and Liberalism

In 2018 Patrick Deneen, a professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, authored a book named *Why Liberalism Failed*. The book contains a rather stern critique of a political philosophy long held in the West. This paper will attempt to critically examine the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in light of Deneen's critique. In particular, this paper will examine Liberalism's claims about human nature.

Before any progress can be made, a proper understanding of Deneen's critique of Liberalism is in order. Deneen swiftly explains the failure of liberalism, "Liberalism has failed – not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself. It has failed because it has succeeded. As liberalism has 'become more fully itself,' as its inner logic has become more evident and itself – contradictions manifest, it has generated pathologies that are once deformations of its claims yet realizations of liberal ideology."¹ The core of Deneen's case against Liberalism rests on his understanding of Liberalism as an ideology. Deneen considers all ideologies to be ultimately unsustainable; he believes this

¹ Deneen, Patrick J. *Why Liberalism Failed*. (Yale University Press, 2019), 3

to be one of “the few iron laws of politics”². Liberalism was doomed from its inception as all ideologies are.

The question to ask then is, why is it the case that ideologies will fail? According to Deneen, Liberalism is not the only modern political ideology. Fascism and Communism are the other failed modern ideologies. The root failure of ideology is its philosophical anthropology. Ideologies are based on falsehoods about human nature, and anything based upon a lie is doomed to failure. Due to the falseness of their premises, ideologies are ultimately incapable of keeping their promises. While an ideology may be initially successful, as time progresses, the gap between the claims of ideology about lived human experience and the actual lived experience of human persons widens, and the regime instituted by the ideology loses legitimacy.³ When an ideology comes to that crucial breaking point, it has two options, “Either it enforces conformity to a lie it struggles to defend, or it collapses when the gap between claim and reality, finally result in wholesale loss of belief among the populace.”⁴, Deneen warns. The political history of the 20th century, which Deneen might call the century of ideology, is rife with examples of totalitarian states enforcing conformity to their ideology by means of brutal violence. The horrors of the Soviet gulag system, Maoist China, or the concentration camps of Nazi German stand as bloody witnesses to the power of ideology. Having set forth his main argument against ideology, Deneen turns to address the falsehoods of Liberalism’s philosophical anthropology.

² Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 6

³ Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 6

⁴ Ibid

The core commitment of Liberalism is to freedom. This commitment has made it resilient and attractive because the desire for freedom is “so deeply embedded in the human soul.”⁵ The problem, for Deneen, is not Liberalism’s recognition of the desire for freedom, but rather the re-definition of freedom that Liberalism offers in place of an older understanding of freedom. In addition to the re-definition of freedom, there are two deep anthropological assumptions at the root of Liberalism, which serve as the falsehoods about human nature, on which Liberalism builds the political order. Deneen says,

Liberalism is constituted by a pair of deeper anthropological assumptions that give liberal institutions a particular orientation and cast: 1) anthropological individualism and the voluntarist conception of choice, and 2) human separation from and opposition to nature. These two revolutions in the understanding of human nature and society constitute ‘Liberalism’ inasmuch as they introduce a radically new definition of ‘liberty.’⁶

According to the first anthropological assumption, humans are, by their nature, radically free individuals. Persons are conceived of as being completely separate from one another and autonomous. It is through the first anthropological assumption that a different idea of what constitutes freedom is adopted, while the original word is kept. The re-definition of freedom consists primarily in the rejection of the ancient conception of freedom as self-governance. For the ancients, self-governance was the practice of virtue. It was the understanding of freedom articulated by men like Plato and Aristotle, and eventually was adapted by Christian thinkers to fit the Christian worldview. This notion of freedom held

⁵ Ibid, 21

⁶ Ibid, 31

that freedom was freedom from the passion, the base desires which, if given dominion in the soul, caused a person to suffer. Life under the reign of the passion simultaneously made man a tyrant and a slave. His slavery was not to external power, but to his own internal lusts. Plato thought the life of the tyrannical man was the most wretched life a human could live. In contrast the goal of the virtuous person was to orientate oneself toward the Good. Conscious and deliberate pursuit of the Good through education, and right action, would liberate people from the passions and allow them to live not only a good life, but a life of true freedom. Freedom was found in being able to properly respond to the world of transcendent value, something which the rule of the passions made impossible. Liberalism replaced this understanding of freedom with an understanding of freedom strictly as the ability to choose and act without the constraint of positive law. Deneen points to Locke's and Hobbes' understanding of the state of nature, as the first articulations of this anthropological assumption. The state is founded on the idea that humans turn over some freedoms or rights to a government in order to secure other rights which become jeopardized by the state of nature, which is a state of war. In human society, relationships are conferred only by consent and are entered into on the grounds of mutual self-interest.

The second anthropological assumption rejects the understanding of humans as part of the larger natural order. The second anthropological assumption therefore rejects the Aristotelian idea of *telos*, at least in so far as human persons can be understood as possessing a *telos*, according to their nature. Deneen contends the second anthropological assumption has been embraced at varying degrees by Liberal thinkers. The conservative view sees nature as something over which to gain mastery for the sake of economic

advancement and human well-being. The conservative view, however, draws the line at human essence. It believes human essence is unchangeable, and while it can be harnessed for economic or political uses, it cannot be fundamentally altered. The historically progressive view does not draw the line at human essence but sees human nature as mere another part of nature which science and technology can change fundamentally. There are some thinkers who view the conquest of human essence as the ultimate end of the conquest of nature.

The goal of the Liberalism was to create free human persons, and by free it meant persons who could choose and act without restraint. The Good was no longer the end at which people aimed. Rather, the end was securing personal freedom, and freedom to the utmost degree. “Rights” took precedence over any particular conception of the Good. To achieve this project, humans had to be “liberated” from anything which could limit their choices. According to Deneen, the anthropological assumptions of Liberalism have sought to change four main human intuitions in the name of expanding human liberty and thus allowed people to be the masters of their own fates. Politics and government, economics, education, and science and technology have been commandeered and transformed to expand human freedom.

The primary purpose of the state was to liberate persons to pursue their particular idea of the good life and provide an arena in which that could occur by issuing the rule of law and thereby secure personal rights and freedoms. The rule of law made possible the expansion of economic markets, as it guaranteed transactions. This also advanced the Liberal project of freedom, as open markets fostered new business ventures and new products, which gave consumers more choices and allowed upwards economic mobility.

The state was enough to secure political freedom, and open space for free market economics, but it was insufficient to secure other kinds of freedom.

In order to achieve complete freedom persons also need to be liberated from one another. Therefore, humans must be thought of as radically free but also radically individualistic. Relationships exist as service to mutual self-interest. Social norms also must be cast off in the name freedom from cultural oppression. The aim of education also had to be fundamentally changed. Education must prepare persons to be free, or the kind of persons who determine the good life for themselves. Finally, humans must be liberated from the constraints of the natural order. Science's main end was to produce technology by which natural limitations could be overcome. Nature would conform to human will rather than humans to nature's will.

Rather than making life better, however, people have become disgruntled. Deneen claims that, "In each case (the four human institutions), widespread anger and deepening discontent have arisen from the spreading realization that the vehicles of our liberation have become iron cages of our captivity."⁷ Liberalism promised a state grounded on popular consent, however, people now feel increasingly isolated from their popularly elected officials. The government no longer seems to be "of the people, for the people", but rather of the rich and powerful, for the rich and powerful.⁸ The free market offers more goods for consumers than ever before; however, people feel the forces of de-personalized massive markets with companies "too big to fail" underpinned by nerve-racking instability. Meanwhile, the divide between the rich and poor seems to grow wider

⁷ Ibid, 6

⁸ Ibid, 7

and wider each day, and the poor are fed the opiate that they are the richest people in history.⁹ Public education, rather than preparing young people to be virtuous men and women, prepares them to enter an economy and political sphere which they increasingly view with cynicism. They do not feel liberated, but rather crushed, doomed to engage in a meaningless world.¹⁰ Science and technology have proved to be extremely powerful, but much of the technology has left people in existential discomfort. Much good has been brought about from the advance of science and technology, but as human capacity to improve life has grown so has human's capacity to bring utter annihilation. In addition to the existential unease of technologically induced catastrophe, as technology increasingly grows more powerful, people are forced into the existential quandary of, "Do I control technology or does technology control me?".¹¹

Liberalism has made people free, but it has also made them miserable. In its quest for unrestrained human freedom, Liberalism has emphasized right over good. Human institutions have been made into spaces where persons have the right to pursue whatever they desire. Liberalism's understanding of freedom, individualism, and nature leads people to a hellacious combination of loneliness, cynicism, and exploitation, as people live in accordance to a faulty metaphysic. People may have gained the right to do as they please, but have learned that while everything may be permissible, not everything is beneficial.

A critic may question whether the state ought to be based on account of human nature, and it is certainly worth contemplating the truth of such an idea. This paper,

⁹ Ibid, 8

¹⁰ Ibid, 11

¹¹ Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 15

however, is not concerned with the answer to that inquiry. While someone may ponder whether the political order ought to be based on an account of human nature, it is clear that Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau do base their respective political philosophies on their own philosophical anthropologies.

Chapter 1: Hobbes

Before any account of Thomas Hobbes' unique political philosophy can be given, some historical context must be understood. Thomas Hobbes published *The Leviathan* in 1651, the last year of the English Civil War. Hobbes crafts his account of humanity and the political order, which can be called pessimistic, with the civil war in his mind. Any war is a terrible experience, but civil war brings with it a unique form of chaos and social upheaval.

The connection between human nature and establishing a political order can be seen early in Hobbes' thinking. His seminal work on political philosophy, *Leviathan*, whose full title is *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme, and Power of A Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, is divided into four sections. The first section is labeled "On Man". This, on its own, is not enough to prove Hobbes bases his account of politics on his theory of human nature, but it is an interesting move. Nevertheless, subheadings can often be misleading, and it is better to gather evidence from the text itself.

In the introduction to the *Leviathan* Hobbes makes explicit the connection between mankind and the state. He says, "For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE ... which is but an Artificial Man; though of

greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defense it was intended.”¹² Hobbes then briefly explains how each part of the state corresponds to a part of the natural man. The sovereign is an artificial soul that gives life to the state like the soul gives life to the natural man. The magistrates and officers are artificial joints; reward and punishment are the nerves, which stimulate the body to move; the wealth and riches of the people are the strength of the body; the business councilors are the memory, by which what is important is known and held; equity is reason; the laws are the will; civil concord is health; sedition in the state is sickness, and finally civil war is death.¹³

Whenever parts of man are correlated to parts of the state it is hard to not think about Plato. Immediately the difference between the correlations Hobbes draws and Plato draws can be seen. Plato only correlated the tripart soul to three distinct social roles in the state, Hobbes draws more parallels. Plato proposed studying the city as “the soul of man writ large”¹⁴ in order to come to a better understanding of justice and the analogy is drawn explicitly. Plato determines that the just city is ruled by the philosopher kings and queens. The philosopher king is an image of the reason which rules over the spirited part and the appetitive parts, because the one who is suited to rule is the one who knows the Good and can order things according to goodness. The part of the soul which is capable of knowing the Good is intellect and is therefore suited to rule over the soul. Hobbes does not return to the idea of the state strictly understood as a bigger and stronger artificially constructed man in the remainder of the *Leviathan*. Indeed, it is hard to understand the parallels Hobbes draws if one attempts to interpret Hobbes as attempting to carry out the same

¹² Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds Interpretations*. Ed by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), 9 [2]

¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 9 [2]

¹⁴ Plato Republic 368b-369a

project as Plato. If Hobbes is interpreted as attempting the same project as Plato then, the ways in which state is just a bigger stronger artificial man may be attributed to the fact that Hobbes eventually reduces the state to a singular individual, whom he calls the Sovereign.¹⁵ But Hobbes reduces the state to one man not because there is one justice for both the city and the soul. Rather, because his account of men and their inherent conflict with one another. Hobbes expresses the real project of his book later in the introduction, “He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science; yet when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself.”¹⁶ A successful ruler must understand not himself as a particular man but as the whole of mankind. In a way Hobbes’ account is the reverse of Plato; he turns to man in order to understand the state. As will be see, however, Hobbes’ study of mankind is not a positive one, and his invitation to reflect on his account is an invitation to wrestle with one’s shadow.

If Hobbes is famous for anything then it is for saying the life of man is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short”.¹⁷ Like most famous quotes, however, the larger context of the point is lost and his words are often appropriated by others for their own aims. Any mildly competent student of the *Leviathan* will know that when Hobbes describes the life of man as “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” he is discussing the natural state of man, or the condition of man without a civil government. The condition of man without a

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 95 [87]

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 10 [2]

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 70 [62]

civil government can be described in one word: war. The state of nature, however, is the worst kind of war because it is *bellum omnium contra omnes*.¹⁸ There is no security, everyone is alone, and no one can be trusted for more than a short period of time. As such, no kind of civilization can develop. It is an interesting position; a description of a world without a government is usually reserved for imaginative post-apocalyptic dime novels. How does Hobbes get to such a grim view of what men would be like without a common government?

In order to understand why Hobbes believes that men without government live in a state of war, one must begin in an unexpected place. Oddly enough, Hobbes' state of nature begins with his contempt for Scholastic philosophy. Hobbes notes that of all creatures, man is the only one subject to being absurd, or uttering words that lack meaning. There is one kind of man, however, that is particularly subject to falling into absurdity, the Philosopher. Hobbes says, "And of men, those are of all most subject to it (absurdity), that professe, Philosophy... there can be nothing so absurd, but may be found in the books of Philosophers."¹⁹ The problem with philosophers is that they do not begin their reasoning from definitions, or "settled significations of their words". Therefore, according to Hobbes, they fall into using absurd words such as, "hypostatical", "transubstantiate", "consubstantiate", and many others that are merely "the canting of schoolemen".²⁰ It is Hobbes' rejection of scholastic philosophy, which was the baptism of

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid, 27 -28 [21]

²⁰ Ibid, 28 [21] It is an interesting note that Hobbes considers the ideas of immaterial substance, and free-will also to be absurd. It is unclear how seriously he took the conclusions of what he had said, but it is fair to say that in name he is a materialist. He, however, is not a hard determinist, but rather seems to embrace a Compatibilist view of human free will.

Greek and Roman thought into the light of Christianity, that sets up his first crucial step in constructing the state of nature.

Hobbes first rejects the idea of objective good and evil. He returns to the position of Protagoras the Sophist, that man is the measure of all things. Hobbes says,

But whatsoever is the object of man's appetite or desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his hate, and aversion, Evill... For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemtable, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill to be taken from the nature of objects themselves²¹

Had Hobbes only asserted that what people desire they call good and what they hate they call evil, then he would not be rejecting the past at all. In fact, he would be making the same observation as Socrates. The assertion, however, that there is no good or evil taken from the essence of things themselves is an explicit turn against Aristotelian thinking, which was baptized by the Scholastic thinkers, and most notably by Saint Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle thought a good thing was only good if it fulfilled its end or *telos*. A good knife is one which fulfils its purpose of cutting. Hobbes is a materialist; the only substances are material. Therefore, if good or evil are real properties which exist in their own right then they must be material. Obviously, goodness or badness are not in the objects themselves, for what is "good matter" or "bad matter"? From where then does goodness or badness come? The answer must be from humans, and it must be primarily an experience in humans caused by the material. Hobbes reduces moral language to a

²¹ Ibid, 32 [25]

similar status as color.²² Just as there is no color in itself; only objects which reflect light into our eyes, so goodness is caused by the physical movements in our body which draw us towards an object. Even the desires of persons are reducible to what Hobbes calls “endeavors”, which are the small beginnings of motion with the physical bodies of men.²³

Hobbes’ turn against Aristotelean thinking does not end with his repudiation of *telos*. He extends his rejection of Aristotle to his understanding of morality and happiness. Aristotle bases his account of happiness, which is the ultimate end, after which all human chase, on an account of human nature. The happy person is the person who fulfills his *telos*. Hobbes creates an account of happiness, which is not based on a goodness relational to a thing’s nature. He says, “To which end we are to consider, that the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest good) as is spoken of the Old Moral Philosophers.”²⁴ Based on the comments Hobbes previously made, it is reasonable to believe that Aristotle is among the “old moral philosophers”.²⁵ Having cleared the ground, Hobbes introduces his new definition of happiness. He says, “Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, that the object of man’s desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and or one instant of time; but to assure forever, the way of his future desire.”²⁶ In addition to his understanding of happiness, Hobbes

²² Tuck, Richard. “Hobbes on Skepticism and Moral Conflict” in *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds Interpretations*. Edited by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), 340.

²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 24 [17]

²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 55 [47]

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

introduces a psychology of human action: “And therefore the voluntary actions, and inclinations of all men, tend, not onely to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life; and differ only in the way: which ariseth partly from the diversity of passion, in divers men; and partly difference of the knowledge, or opinion each one has of the causes, which produce the effect desired.”²⁷ Hobbes’ account can be broadly categorized as psychological egoism. Human persons are all trying to attain happiness, which is not just the fulfillment of one desire at one time, but also a secure path to the fulfillment of all future desires. The diversity of human pursuits towards the end of happiness can be attributed to two causes: the multiplicity of desires among people and the ways which people think is best to fulfil their desires.

Hobbes’ account does at a surface level seem reasonable. It is certainly true that humans seek the fulfillment of their desires and the guarantee of successive desires. If someone is hungry, he will certainly be pleased to attain one meal, but the human condition involves an awareness of one’s being in time. A hungry person may be satisfied by one meal now, but he knows that there will be a time in the future where he is hungry again, and if possible, he will attempt to secure means of guaranteed fulfillment of his desires. The adage understands what Hobbes means: “Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for the day. Teach a man to fish and he’ll eat for the rest of his life.”

Hobbes’ account of the diversity of human interests and actions also seems reasonable. It is apparently obvious after a few conversations with different people that different people have different interests and tastes. One person may have a taste for fine

²⁷ Ibid

French wines, while another prefers Kentucky bourbon. One person may enjoy watching NFL football games, while another prefers to watch NBA basketball. Even people with a common interest may differ in personal tastes. John and Alice may both enjoy watching basketball; however, John may prefer to watch NBA basketball and Alice prefers to watch college basketball. It is also apparent that people can and do pursue even the same goal by different means. Two men may both desire to be wealthy but choose different careers. One may choose to become a banker, while the other chooses to become a brain surgeon.

After declaring happiness to be nothing more than the continual secure progress of the fulfilment of desire to the next desire, Hobbes makes an important move in his understanding of human nature. He says, “I put for a generall inclination of all man-kind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”²⁸ Hobbes’ comment is best understood in light of an early part of the *Leviathan* where Hobbes defines power. He defines the power of man as “his present means to obtain some apparent future good.”²⁹ The Hobbesian understanding of power is then bifurcated into the different types of power: natural power and instrumental power. Natural powers are the faculties of the mind or body. A high IQ, athleticism, or anything that might be called a person’s “natural talents” are what Hobbes has in mind. He lists strength, form, prudence, arts, eloquence, liberality, and nobility or high social rank as examples of natural powers.³⁰ Instrumental powers are powers which are means to attaining more

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, 48 [41]

³⁰ Ibid

powers. Instrumental powers may be procured by natural powers. Hobbes lists money, friends, and reputation, as examples of instrumental powers.

A more complete account of Hobbes' understanding of human nature and psychology can be puzzled together. While Hobbes denies the existence a *finis ultimus* of human existence, each human is seeking his or her own happiness, or the continual fulfilment of one's own desires. Whatever a person desires he calls "good" and whatever he finds loathsome or adverse he calls "bad". Everyone therefore is seeking his or her own "good" as defined by the confines of their personal desires, and for them to be happy is to merely achieve these successive "goods". In addition to desiring the goods themselves every human person also desires the means to procure whatever they call good, and the means to achieve a good is power. Thus, everyone seeks power in relation to the seeking of happiness. The restlessness of the human heart as it pursues happiness is thus the source of the restless desire for power.³¹

With the restlessness of human nature, and no universal goodness or badness, Hobbes begins to construct the state of natural man. The state of nature begins with the equality of all mankind. All men are ultimately equal; there may be a great difference in physical strength or intelligence, but this grants no man a significant advantage over any

³¹ It is interesting that Hobbes notes the desire for power, and implicitly the desire for happiness, only ends in death. Hobbes seemingly misses out on the hopelessness of his position. If happiness is security in the pursuit of desires, then happiness is merely the knowledge that you can get what you want at any point in time. This, however, is something that can never be. As another English man will note, "You can't always get what you want." It is often true that desires must be delayed because they cannot be immediately satisfied, but what happens to a Hobbesian understanding of happiness when we desire things that can never be satisfied. Anyone who has lost a loved one, a friend, a family member, or a spouse knows that there is a deep longing just to be with that person again, but we know that we cannot raise the dead. It seems that in those moments, happiness vanishes, never to be regained. In the Hobbesian account, all happiness must crumble, before the final terror of death.

other man.³² While one man may be stronger than another, the weaker man is still capable of killing the strong man by a careful plot or by banding together with others.³³ The difference in intelligence is even less of a problem in Hobbes' mind. Prudence or wisdom is reducible to experience, which time "equally bestows to all men."³⁴ If someone can survive long enough, while he may be lacking in the natural talent to undertake hard intellectual pursuits, experience will be that which ultimately proves useful. Hobbes has an idea of what can be crudely called "street smarts". Being wise in the ways of the world is much more important than the capacity for intellectual depth. Hobbes has one final reason for believing that intelligence is equally distributed such that no one has a significant advantage over another. Every man is wise in his own eyes, and according to Hobbes, "there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equall distribution of anything, than that every man is contented with his share."³⁵ No one in the state of nature has significant advantage over anyone else; the state of nature is a state of equality.

The equality of each man proves to be the ground from which conflict and war grows. Each man, knowing his own equality with other men, has equal hope for securing his own ends. In a coin toss each man believes he has an equal shot at winning the toss, and in the state of nature each man believes himself just as capable as anyone else of securing what he desires. In the state of nature, each man believes himself to be just as good as the next man. Predictably, men come into conflict with one another when they both desire the same end. Specifically, the end must be one they cannot both enjoy.³⁶ As

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan* 68 [60]

³³ Ibid, 69 [61]

³⁴ Ibid, 69 [61]

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

soon as two men desire the same end, they become enemies and they both wish to beat the other either by destroying the other or by subduing him. The equality of all men amplifies the danger in conflicts of mutual interest, for each man can best the other man. There is also no security in victory, and all men live in a state of anxiety. For example, two men may disagree over who will possess a certain plot of land. The first man may act quickly and kill the second man and thus guarantee his possession of the land, but he will have no security. Another man or group of men may soon come along and drive him off the land. The avengers of the second man may come to kill the first man for shedding the blood of their friend. Even if a good is gained without initial conflict, the possession of a good makes one vulnerable to conflict because at any moment someone else may desire the same thing.

Every man should prefer to live in the state of nature and to be above falling victim to other men, but they know that is not possible. So, for the sake of escaping the nastiness, shortness, and brutishness of the life of war they contrive to surrender their capacity to determine their own desires and submit them to one man who will make the choices about good and evil for all. The choice to leave the state of nature can be understood in terms of gambling. The ultimate desire, the one that trumps all other desires, is survival. It is much easier to stay alive in times of peace than wartime.³⁷ The odds of survival in peace are much better than the odds of survival on a battlefield.

Before the state of nature is left behind and civil society is formed, Hobbes introduces two important concepts: *Jus Naturale* (Right of Nature) and *Lex Naturalis*

³⁷ Tuck, Richard. "Hobbes on Skepticism and Moral Conflict" in *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds Interpretations*. Edited by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), 344.

(Law of Nature). *Jus Naturale* is Hobbes' formulation of the natural right of mankind.

The natural right of man is the liberty to act in the preservation of his own life, according to his best judgement. *Lex Naturalis* or natural law are the general rules found out by reason that forbid a man to do that which would be destructive to his own life or take away his means of preserving his own life. Hobbes gives his understanding of Right and Law. Right is the freedom to do; Law constrains freedom and dictates what one must do. Law and Right are incompatible and an increase in right is a decrease in law, and the contrary also holds.³⁸

The inverse relationship between Law and Right, for Hobbes, needs to be understood because the transition from the state of nature to the civil association is an exchange of right for law. The state of nature is a period of absolute right; everyman has a right to everything, including to the bodies of other men. This state of war and absolute right, however, is not worth living in. Here Hobbes introduces his first two laws of nature. The first is to seek peace and follow it. Now, this does not trump the natural right to act according to one's best judgement in the preservation of his own life; a person may engage in self-defense. From the first law, the second law of nature is derived, and it is the foundation of the state. The second law of nature is. "That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself."³⁹ This is Hobbes' social contract. Freedom shall be surrendered in the name of pursuing peace, but the rights do

³⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 72 [64]

³⁹ Ibid, 72 [65]

not disappear into thin air. Someone must stand above the social contract and take up the surrendered rights; that man will have more freedom than another man. Hobbes describes the genesis of the commonwealth thus:

The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Forraigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their owne industrie, and by the fruits of the Earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that they may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will... and therein to submit their Wills, everyone to his Will, and their Judgements to his Judgement.

This is more than Consent, or Concord; it is a real unitie of them all.⁴⁰

This man shall be the Sovereign, or the Mortal God. Hobbes calling the Sovereign a Mortal God may seem a bit extreme; however, when the sheer amount of power the Sovereign wields is considered such a name does not appear to be hyperbolic. In Chapter eighteen, Hobbes lists twelve rights of the Sovereign:

- 1) The right to rule without rebellion. His subjects do not have the right to overthrow their Sovereign.
- 2) The right to rule without being accused of breaking the social contract.
- 3) The right to rule without unanimous consent of the people. (This is because the Sovereign is established by majority vote and therefore everyone agreed to abide by the majority decision).

⁴⁰ Hobbes *Leviathan* 95 [88]

- 4) The right to rule independently of civil laws.
- 5) The right to rule without being punished by his subjects.
- 6) The right to control the speech of his subjects, to govern opinion censure books, and determine the True Religion of the state.⁴¹
- 7) The right to make laws and define property.
- 8) The right to ultimately settle all legal disputes.
- 9) The right to make war and peace with other nations.
- 10) The right to select ministers of the government.
- 11) The right to punish and reward his subjects.
- 12) The right to determine degrees of honor and define goodness and evil.⁴²

At first glance, Hobbes' solution to the state of nature is to institute a totalitarian regime with an authoritarian dictator, but the subjects of the Sovereign do have some freedom. Chapter twenty-one of the *Leviathan* is entitled, "Of the LIBERTY of Subjects". In this chapter, Hobbes reasserts his position that liberty or freedom is the unimpeded movement of bodies. He defines a free-man as "he that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to".⁴³ This liberty is not lost in the common-wealth, unless one commits a crime and is punished by imprisonment. In profound ways, it is still possible for the subjects of a Sovereign to live what could be called a free life. The Liberty of the subject is primarily in the absence of the Law. As long as the Sovereign permits, subjects are free to buy, sell, trade, form contracts with one another, choose their own house, determine their diet,

⁴¹ Ibid, 95 [87]

⁴² Hobbes *Leviathan* 96 – 102 [88 – 94]

⁴³ Ibid, 115 [108]

select their own profession, and educate their children as they think best.⁴⁴ The primary purpose of the Sovereign is to ensure defense from foreign invaders and peace between citizens. Unless the examples given above become a source of internal conflict, the Sovereign has no reason to concern himself with such things, and no reason to pass laws about them. The subjects also have one ultimate right, one ultimate freedom, which the Sovereign cannot take from them. They always have the right to defend their own life, even against a fair and just condemnation of the Sovereign. This also means that subjects cannot be ordered to harm themselves or join a war unless they want to fight.⁴⁵ Certainly the Sovereign has the right to become an authoritarian regime that dictates the every detail of his subjects life, but it is not his goal, and therefore not a concern of Hobbes.

It is easy to be critical of Hobbes. He received much criticism from his contemporaries and has not been endorsed by modern readers. The authoritarian regimes of the 20th century and their horrors are not easily forgotten. It is an easy critique to make, but also a legitimate concern. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Deneen, however, does not critique Hobbes on these grounds, but rather for Hobbes' account of human nature. It is important that Deneen does not consider Hobbes to full be a Liberal thinker, but rather a "protoliberal".⁴⁶ Deneen's distinction is certainly correct; Hobbes' conclusions about how the state should be ordered are far from the conclusions that later more Liberal thinkers will espouse. The idea of an all-powerful, all-encompassing state would have been equally repulsive to both the American Founding Fathers, and the revolutionaries in France. Nevertheless, Hobbes is still guilty of one of

⁴⁴ Ibid, 117 [110]

⁴⁵ Ibid, 119 – 120 [112 – 113]

⁴⁶ Deneen *Why Liberalism Failed*, 31

the two failings of the Liberal ideology, according to Deneen. Hobbes bases politics on human voluntarism – “the unfettered and autonomous choice of individuals”⁴⁷ As part of the larger theme of addressing the anthropology of Liberal authors the remainder of this paper will address Deneen’s concern about anthropological voluntarism.

It should be evident by now, however, that Hobbes’ account of human nature is not merely reducible to voluntarism. Deneen says about the origin of Hobbes’ state, “The state is created to restrain the external actions of individuals and legally restricts the potentially destructive activity of radically separate human beings. Law is a set of practical restraints upon self-interested individuals.”⁴⁸ Deneen emphasizes Hobbes’ view of humans as nonrelational autonomous creatures by nature. While Hobbes thinks the state of nature is solitary, it is not obvious that this is because Hobbes conceives as humans as essentially nonrelational. Let us explore further to see if Deneen’s concern is well grounded.

Arguably the solitariness of the state of nature stems from the fact that it is a state of war. The only right humans have irrevocably is the right to self-preservation, and they may take whatever means are necessary to secure their own life. Even under the Mortal God, the Sovereign, the individual citizen has the right to protect his own life. In the *bellum omnium contra omnes* the ultimate goal is survival. The goal of survival is the root of two of the sources of conflict in the state of nature: defense and glory. Defense can be understood in many ways, but the goal is the protection of one’s own life, and since there is no justice or injustice in the state of nature, any perceived threat is enough

⁴⁷ Deneen *Why Liberalism Failed*, 31

⁴⁸ Deneen *Why Liberalism Failed* 32

to act in such a way to insure the protection of one's life.⁴⁹ The other source of conflict is glory, which arises from the slighting on one's name or families name. Insults to each other's honor is enough to incite conflict. Glory seems to be the outlier in Hobbes' understanding of conflict in the state of nature. It is not immediately obvious like competition and defense. While it can be believed, for certainly history is filled with men fighting over slights of honor, it still does not appear to fit. If the goal of the state of nature, however, is merely survival then glory, or a reputation of power, becomes a useful tool. If one man is feared above all others, then men are not likely to attempt to conquer him. The owner of that reputation cannot afford it to be questioned, lest they lose their own life. Therefore, he will strike with great violence and make an example of those who question him.

The other source of conflict in the state of nature is a result of Hobbes' materialism. Hobbes rejects the idea of immaterial substance. How does this lead men to conflict? According to Hobbes, the source of competition and conflict is when two persons desire the same end and they cannot both achieve it. The question remains: how does that relate to Hobbes' materialism? It is tied directly to Hobbes' understanding of desire and aversion. Hobbes works with the idea that desires have objects. Put in different terms, desires are for something. If someone says, "I desire" then the question that immediately follows is "What do you desire?". Hobbes accepts this idea for both desire and aversion. Desire is the motion towards an object; aversion is movement away from an object. As is noted earlier, what men desire they call "good" and what men find

⁴⁹ Tuck, Richard. "Hobbes on Skepticism and Moral Conflict" in *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds Interpretations*. Edited by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), 344.

adverse the call “bad” or “evil”. Given Hobbes’ materialism, whatever the object of desire, it must be material. This, however, makes all desiring a zero-sum game. While a materialist might accept an infinite universe, they certainly cannot believe that the planet Earth is infinite. Earth is finite, and the material of which she is composed is finite. Therefore, there are only so many material objects that can exist on the Earth at a given time, even if all the material potential was made actual. Mankind may live in peace for a time, as long as their desires do not exceed that which can actually be provided. Recall, however, that each human possesses a restless desire for power which ceases only in death, and that power is the ability to secure the objects of one’s desire. There is no moderation in the human spirit. It is statistically inevitable that men will come to desire the same object, and thus be plunged into the state of war.

It is certainly not a life one would choose to live, but it is worth wondering: Has Deneen gone too far? Does Hobbes really conceive humans as nonrelational beings? Certainly, war is a kind of relation, not a good kind, but a kind of relation, nevertheless. I will attempt to argue in the terms of personalist philosophy, that Hobbes does not have room in his account for the genuine inter-personal encounter. In Hobbes’ account men may interact with one another as objects but never as other persons.

Personalist philosophers, such as Max Scheler and Martin Buber, distinguish two realms in which human persons dwell. These two realms are “environment” and the “world”. John Crosby explains the personalist understanding of environment, “My environment is constituted when I approach my surroundings using my needs as principle of selection; I notice just those things in my surroundings that promise to fulfill some need or that threaten to block the fulfillment of some needs; whatever in my surrounding

has no bearing on my needs is ignored and does not enter into my environment.”⁵⁰ What things are apart from needs, their existence in their own right, are of no interest in someone’s environment. This realm is occupied not only by human persons but also by the conscious animals. The animals, however, are environment-bound, while human person is not. Persons are open to the second realm, the world; persons are world-open beings.⁵¹ World-openness is characterized in two ways. First, world-openness is marked by an awakening of the “sense of the whole of reality” in a person. There is a realization that there is more than whatever particular part had been the focus. There is an unsurpassable whole. The second characteristic of world-openness is the capacity for a person to consider things in their own right. The focus is shifted from us and our needs. We can be “captivated by the otherness of things”.⁵² Everything is no longer pragmatically subservient to our needs. We can consider things objectively or as they are in themselves. According to John Crosby, the first characteristic and second characteristic of world – openness are related: the sense of the whole of reality and the ability to consider things in their own right interplay with one another, “What something *real and ultimately is* can be understood only by inserting the thing in its place in the whole, and so this ‘objectivity’ that we aim at as world open beings, awakens us in that sense of the whole that also characterizes us as world open beings. We human persons live in both realms – not only in our environment, but also in the world.”⁵³ There are some philosophers who would dispute the claim that human persons live in both the world and

⁵⁰ John Crosby *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 21 – 22.

⁵¹ Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 22

⁵² Ibid, 23

⁵³ Ibid

their environment, and reduce human beings to living only in their environment. John Crosby points to the difference between Plato and Protagoras as the difference between a philosopher who allows for world-openness and a philosopher who reduces person to their environment. Plato's teachings radically decentralize human persons, allowing them to be the kind of beings who can be open to the world and consider things in themselves. Protagoras, however, thrusts man into the center of the world by declaring man to be the measure of all things, and thus confines man to his environment. Everything is defined in relation to man, to his wants, desires, and needs. Protagoras is not the only philosopher who reduces human persons to their environments. Richard Rorty and Fredrick Nietzsche also reduce persons to their environment. Even while they expand the list of needs to complex needs, such as religious needs, the fundamental relationship to the world is dominated by our needs. Their philosophies cannot bear "the idea of things appearing as they are in their own right".⁵⁴

Hobbes makes the same move as Protagoras and reduces persons to their environment. Recall what Hobbes says about good and bad. Good things are the objects of our desire, and bad things are the objects of our aversions. Good and bad are defined in relation to man. Like color, there is no objective property of good in a material object itself; it is in our minds. Man is once again thrust to the center of the world. The human person is confined to his environment. He either moves towards things which are objects of his desire or moves away from things which are the objects of his aversion. The objects which neither repulse him nor draw him are not factored into his account. Hobbes' anthropocentrism explains why he believe all humans have "perpetual and

⁵⁴ Ibid, 23

restless desire” for power.⁵⁵ The most basic need for human beings is the desire to keep living, the need for survival. This basic need defines in a large part what men and women will call good or bad. This basic desire for survival, of course, ceases in death. If it ceases before that moment, then it usually results in death. Hobbes’ definition of power as the ability to secure future goods brings us to the conclusion that everyone has a restless desire for power that ends only in death. Everyone desires to keep living, and to secure the things which will keep them living, and thus everyone desires power. The ubiquitous desire for survival is what compels men out of the state of nature. In which state is it easier to survive, the state of war or the state of peace? For Hobbes, it is an absurd conclusion to believe that someone can preserve his own life easier in the state of war.⁵⁶ The commonwealth itself does not exist apart from the needs of man. Even the Mortal God no longer has authority if he fails to protect the lives of his subjects.

How does Hobbes’ confinement of persons to their environments shed any light about whether human beings are nonrelational by nature in Hobbes’ account? Environment bound beings cannot have interpersonal encounters and therefore are nonrelational. The problem is that our environment does not only contain objects in it, but also other human persons. Before real interpersonal encounters can occur, there must be a recognition of the other as a subject. Interpersonal encounter is not a relationship to something but to *someone, a who, not a what*. This is the distinction Martin Buber makes in a classic of personalist philosophy, *Ich und Du*. In order to encounter others as subjects, we must have a sense of the whole of reality, a feature which belongs to world-

⁵⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 55 [47]

⁵⁶ Tuck, Richard. “Hobbes on Skepticism and Moral Conflict” in *Leviathan: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds Interpretations*. Edited by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), 346.

openness and not the environment. In Hobbes' view, every person I encounter, I will not encounter as a You, but as an It. Every person will be encountered as something in relation to my desires. Two persons, John and Sarah, may be in the same room together, and may encounter each other in many ways. John may see Sarah as possessing a useful skill which will help achieve some desire, or he may encounter Sarah as an enemy, as something which will prevent him from achieving some desire, or he may encounter her as a sexual object, something which is the end of his desire. In all these cases, however, he does not encounter Sarah qua Sarah. He never encounters her as a being who lives out of her interiority, who is unrepeatable, and a being of infinite dignity. The result of Hobbes' account is a reduction of human persons to the level of intelligent animals. It should not be surprising that the natural state of humans for Hobbes is a state of war, for why should anything better be expected from animals? It is fitting that Hobbes aims to control people by the fear of death and pain, because that is how animals are controlled.

Chapter 2: Locke

It is not uncommon to hear John Locke and Thomas Hobbes mentioned in the same sentence. Locke can rightfully be considered the successor of Hobbes. Locke, like Hobbes, begins his account of the origins of Government with the state of nature, and then explains why men come together in free association to form the political order. It would be a mistake, however, to believe these two thinkers are articulating the same position. If Hobbes is a proto-Liberal thinker, then Locke is a Liberal thinker proper. As we have seen Hobbes is comfortable instituting the Sovereign, a man with totalitarian power, in order to ensure peace between men. Locke would consider the Sovereign to be a tyrant. Locke is more concerned installing a limited government whose purpose is to

secure the fundamental rights of life, liberty, and property of the persons who entered into the political organization.

Locke like Hobbes begins his account of the origins of the political order with an account of the state of nature. Locke, however, does not consider the state of nature to be the state of war, whereas Hobbes believes the state of nature to be synonymous with the state of war.⁵⁷ But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Like Hobbes, Locke conceives of the state of nature as a state of absolute freedom. He says, “We must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a *state of perfect freedom* to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.”⁵⁸ Locke also agrees that the state of nature is a state of natural equality. He explicitly states,

A *state* also of *equality*, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creature of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal to one amongst another without subordination or subjection.⁵⁹

In Locke’s state of nature, as in Hobbes’ state of nature, the commonality of our shared human nature means that no one is subject to anyone else’s authority. Our natural equality, our natural state of not being subject to anyone, compliments Locke’s understanding of everyone as a freely acting agent. There is no one who can rightfully

⁵⁷ John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 15 Chapter 3 S19

⁵⁸ Ibid, 8 Chapter 2 S4

⁵⁹ Ibid, 8 Chapter 2 S4

assert their will over me except myself. Thus, Locke establishes two primary characteristics of human nature. All men are equal and independent.

Locke is quick to clarify that while the state of nature is a state of liberty, it is not a state of license. Human actions are still constrained by the natural law. An important part of human nature is everyone's status as rational beings. As rational beings everyone has access to the same truths that can be derived from reason, assuming they pay careful attention and reason correctly. Locke says, "The *state of nature* has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm one another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."⁶⁰ Appropriately, Locke gives his reasons for accepting the command to not harm anyone else in their life, health, liberty, or possessions. The first reason is related to God. All men are the creatures of God, who is infinitely wise and omnipotent; mankind lives to serve God and is subject to his will, and therefore ought to endure on the Earth as long as God wills. The other reason is based on everyone's natural equality. Because everyone possesses a common nature and access to the same abilities, there can be no ordering among individuals which would permit anyone to destroy others. No one is to be used as if they were a lower animal.⁶¹ Locke points out that the command to not harm anyone's life, health, liberty, or possessions also extends to one's own self. We are not at liberty to commit suicide.

A critic may object that while certain men are aware of the laws of nature, there is no one who will enforce them. What good is an unenforced law? An unenforced law

⁶⁰ Ibid, 9 Chapter 2 S6

⁶¹ Ibid, 9 Chapter 2 S6

might as well not be a law. Some people of strong conscience may follow the natural law, certainly the great majority of people will ignore its commands. This is the problem Hobbes has. Hobbes has an idea of natural law, but in his state of nature, there is no one to enforce it and therefore it goes ignored, even though if all men followed the natural law it would lift them out of the state of war. Locke is not unaware of this problem and has a simple solution to it. In the state of nature, everyone has the power of the natural law in their hands and may punish violators as is appropriate. He says,

The *execution* of the law of nature is, in that state, put into everyman's hands, whereby everyone has a right to punish the transgressor of that law to such as degree, as may hinder its violation: for the *law of nature* would, as all other laws that concern men in this world, be in vain, if there were no body that in the state of nature had *power* to *execute* that law.⁶²

Punishment, however, is not to be arbitrary, but rather must be handed out to the violator in “so far as calm reason and conscience dictate what is proportionate to his transgression”⁶³ Locke, unlike Hobbes, believes there are standards of justice and injustice, which are derived from reason. They are universal and objective standards to which all men are subject. The person who violates the natural law declares himself to “to live by another rule than that of reason”.⁶⁴ Such a person has committed an offence against all of mankind and is a threat to all of mankind. All men, having a right by nature to their own lives, but also to the protection of mankind in general are therefore

⁶² Ibid, 10 Chapter 2 S7

⁶³ Ibid, 10 Chapter 2 S8

⁶⁴ Ibid, 10 Chapter 2 S8

authorized to neutralize the threat.⁶⁵ Locke is aware of a potential objection to allowing men to hand down punishments in the state of nature. He objects to his own argument saying, “It is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends: and on the other side, that ill nature, passion, and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others; and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow.”⁶⁶ To Locke’s credit, he admits this is a fair objection; certainly, men are not well suited to judge and punish when it comes to their own cases. While Locke paints a state of nature that is not necessarily a state of war, he does present an account of the state of war.

The state of war is not a good thing; it is a state of “enmity” and “destruction”.⁶⁷ The state of war arises when one man uses force or declares his intention to use force against another man. Locke’s state of war relates to the rights of life, liberty, and property inherent to everyone. If anyone uses force to violate these rights, then they enter the state of war with the person they have violated, and the victim has the right to defend himself. In addition, everyone else has a right to punish the offender, and perhaps even a duty to do because the natural law states that mankind ought to be persevered.⁶⁸ This is not synonymous with the state of nature because the state of nature merely exists when men live only according to natural law with no authority, other than God, above them. The state of war can exist in both political society and in the state of nature. In political society the state of war ends when the use of force ceases. It is much easier to end the state of war in political society because impartial judges and laws can settle the dispute.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 9 Chapter 2 S7

⁶⁶ Ibid, 12 Chapter 2 S13

⁶⁷ Ibid, 14 Chapter 3 S16

⁶⁸ Ibid, 9 Chapter 2 S6

Locke again is keenly aware of the down sides of the state of nature. He says about war in the state of nature,

But where no such appeal is, as in the state of nature, for want of positive laws, and judges with authority to appeal to, the state of war once begun, continues, with a right to the innocent party to destroy the other whenever he can, until the aggressor offers peace and desires reconciliation on such terms as may repair any wrongs he has already done and secure the innocent for the future.⁶⁹

He does not mention the fact that human violence often continues senselessly. While it may be the law of nature that the state of war continues until the victim kills his attacker or the aggressor sues for peace and makes amends, humans rarely abide by such ideals. Locke is aware that men are apt to succumb to their own passion when judging in their own case, excessively punishing those who harmed them, but he does not seem overly concerned that this will perpetuate a cycle of violence. He does note that any small difference between men in the state of nature is apt to result in war.⁷⁰ Locke's depiction of the state of war remains a far cry from Hobbes' characterization.

The question is: why does Locke care at all about drawing a difference between the state of nature and the state of war? If he wants to argue that we should form civil governments then why not equate the state of war and the state of war? The reason is fairly simple. Locke is concerned about tyranny and corrupt governments. After decrying

⁶⁹ Ibid, 15 Chapter 3 S20

⁷⁰ Ibid, 16 Chapter 3 S21

the evils that will surely arise when men judge cases on their own behalf, Locke wages a criticism against monarchy,

Remember, that *absolute monarchs* are but men; and if government is to be the remedy of those evils which necessarily follow from men's being judges in their own cases, and the state of nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire to know what kind of government that is, and how much better it is than the state of nature, where one man, commanding a multitude, has the liberty to be judge in his own case, and may do to his subjects whatever he pleases, without the least liberty to anyone to question or control those execute his pleasure? And in whatsoever he doth, whether led by reason, mistake, or passion, must be submitted to? Much better it is in the state of nature, wherein men are not bound to submit to the unjust will of another: and if he judges, judges amiss in his own, or any other case, he is answerable to the rest of mankind!⁷¹

It is perhaps best to understand Locke in contrast to Hobbes. The point of the social contract in Hobbes is to put in place the Sovereign, who will by fear of death ensure peaceful relations between men. The goal is for everyone to preserve their own life, and peace presents the best chance for that. It is foolish to think one has a better chance of preserving their own life in a state of war than in a state of peace. Recall even though everyone surrenders their rights unto the Sovereign, they do not lose their right to defend their own life, even if they are rightfully prosecuted by the Sovereign. Hobbes' account affirms the goodness of the rule of law. For Hobbes, life under the law, even a corrupt,

⁷¹ Ibid, 12 Chapter 2 S13

controlling law, is better because at least everyone is alive and is not in constant fear of their life.

Locke approaches the situation in a different way. Since the state of war and the state of nature are not inherently the same in Locke's understanding, as they are in Hobbes, one can live in the state of war even in the civic politic. Corrupt governments wage war on their populace, according to Locke. He says, "For where-ever violence is used, and injury done, though by hands appointed to administer justice, it is still violence and injury, however coloured with the name, pretenses, or forms of law, the end whereof being to protect and redress the innocent, and by unbiased application of it to all who are under it; where ever that is not *bona fide* done, *war is made* upon the suffers."⁷² It is fair to say that both Locke and Hobbes believe that the rule of law is good, but they view the law as aimed at different ends. Hobbes believes the law aims at keeping the peace. Locke believes the law serves to protect people's fundamental rights of life, liberty, and property. A violation of any of these three rights demonstrates a willingness to violate any of the other rights, and immediately puts someone in danger of violation of the other two rights. The man who is willing to enslave another man is also a threat to murder the man he is attempting to enslave.

For Locke, the tyrant imposes his will unjustly on his subjects and violates the freedom of his subjects. The tyrant can be understood as a threat to his subjects' property and life. The use of unlawful force against his subjects puts the tyrant at war with his own subjects. Locke implicitly asks his readers the question: If you are at war with someone,

⁷² Ibid, 15 Chapter 3 S20

would you rather they have an immense advantage in power and strength, or would you rather that you and your combatant enjoy no significant advantage over each other?

Obviously, a fair fight is always preferred.

While Locke argues that life in the state of nature is better than life under a bad government, he is nevertheless making an argument for the importance of a good political order. He freely admits there are drawbacks to the state of nature, one being that men will be judges in their own cases and will judge only in their own favor. There are other drawbacks to the state of nature. Locke does not believe that the state of nature will necessarily be a state of war, but he admits that small disagreements in the state of nature will likely result in war.⁷³ Locke is not as pessimistic as Hobbes, but he does believe that humans are fundamentally self-interested as well as ignorant of the Natural Law. He says about the Natural Law, “For though the law of nature be plain and intelligible to all rational creatures; yet men being biased by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a law binding to them in application of it to their particular cases.”⁷⁴ The common tendency of man to break the Natural Law in pursuit of their own self-interest causes the state of nature to become insecure. While all men are free to enjoy their own property, there is almost no security that they will be able to enjoy their property, due to invasion by others.⁷⁵ The natural equality between men increases the insecurity of the state of nature. Every fight is a fight between equals, which encourages further people to take a chance on trespassing against each other’s property.

⁷³ Ibid, 16 Chapter 3 S21

⁷⁴ Ibid, 66 Chapter 9 S124

⁷⁵ Ibid, 65 – 66 Chapter 9 S123

Men, therefore, are willing to give up their natural freedom and natural equality and enter a political order with one another in order to secure their own property. Locke says, “The great and *chief end*, therefore, of men’s uniting into common-wealths, and putting themselves under government, *is the preservation of their property*.”⁷⁶ A settled political order provides three things which the state of nature lacks and which provide security: established, settled, and known laws, that are “received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong and the common measure to decide all controversies between them”, a known impartial judge to settle disputes about the established law, and finally a power to back up the law, which will carry out correct sentences.⁷⁷ When a man enters into political society he gives up two powers which he possesses in the state of nature. He gives up the power to do whatever he thinks fit in order to preserve himself, in so far as permitted by the law of nature, and he gives up the power to carry out punishments.

Why would anyone be willing to give up these natural freedoms and the natural equality of the state of nature? Locke contends people do this for the reason mentioned above. Men give up their natural freedom, equality, and executive power in order to better preserve their own lives, liberty, and property, for no rational creature changes his condition with the intention to make it worse for himself.⁷⁸ Add so Locke concludes, “The power of the society, or *legislative* constituted by them can *never be supposed to extend farther, than the common good*; but is obliged to secure everyone’s property, by

⁷⁶ Ibid, 66 Chapter 9 S124

⁷⁷ Ibid, 66 Chapter 9 124 – 126

⁷⁸ Ibid, 68 Chapter 9 S131

providing against those three defects.”⁷⁹ Government is formed by the people, and exists to protect the life, liberty, and property of the persons who formed it.

Locke’s vision of government has had great influence on the development of Western political thought and the formation of actual governments. The fundamental rights of life, liberty, and property are echoed by Thomas Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence. To Locke’s credit, he is one of the first thinkers to articulate an account of fundamental human rights that everyone enjoys just in their status as human persons. Locke’s vision, ultimately, is one of free, independent, equal, rational agents coming together for the limited purposes of protecting their natural rights. While the Lockean vision of human persons and how they construct their relationships is flattering, it is of concern to Deneen. Deneen’s criticism of the first anthropological assumption of liberalism is a critique fundamentally of Locke. After 300 years of Liberalism, it is hard to see exactly what exactly Deneen’s concern is. The concern is that Locke paints a world without piety, in favor of a world that emphasizes freedom.

Locke’s picture of the world places very few obligations on any other person. The lack of obligations stems from Locke’s conception of human beings as free and Locke’s understanding of freedom. Recall that for Locke freedom is not mere license to do whatever one wills, but rather, “A *liberty* to dispose, and order as he lists, his person, actions, possessions, and his whole property, within the allowance of those laws under which he is, and therein not be subject to the arbitrary will of another, but free follow his own”⁸⁰ Human beings are always under the Natural Law, which primarily commands

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 68 Chapter 9 S131

⁸⁰ Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* 16 Chapter 6 S57

everyone to not harm anyone else in their life, liberty, or property. He does admit that we are all the creation of God and we are his property, but he ends there. If we are the property of God, placed on this Earth to go about his will, ought we not inquire what he wills for us to do? Locke, however, makes no mention of such concerns in *The Second Treatise*.⁸¹ For Locke, the answer to the question “How ought I conduct myself?” is “However you will, in so far as you do not harm anyone in their life, liberty, or property.” Humans then, being rational, may act in so far as things appear good for them, as long as it does not violate the primary negative commands of Reason. This applies also to human relationships with a few positive commands, such as to protect others from attack, to educate children, and to honor parents. The formation of the state emphasizes the citizen’s role in negative freedom as the government takes over positive duties such as protecting others from attack or punishing thieves. The state comes together to protect life, liberty, and property, and it fails when its leaders fail to accomplish the task it was formed to do. When the government fails to achieve its end, then it is time to leave; it is time to return to the state of nature in order that a new social contract may be built from the ashes of the old one. The Lockean position cannot make sense of action toward the state which is not self-serving.

Locke cannot make sense of Socrates’s position in the *Crito*. Under Locke’s account Socrates should flee Athens; the Athenian laws have failed to protect his most basic rights, in this case the right to life. (If Socrates was justly condemned to death, then

⁸¹ There are sections in Locke’s larger corpus of work that he does take up the inquiring into the will of God. In the *Reasonableness of Christianity* (241 – 3), he does argue that divine positive law is equivalent to the natural moral law. In a way then, to inquire into natural rights and the negative commands they place on humans is part of seeking God’s will. Locke’s discussion of God’s will does not extend any further in *The Second Treatise* and it might be useful to consider the rest of the natural law and how it might affect how government ought to be ordered.

Locke would have to say that Socrates should stay as part of his obligation to the law, which requires the punishment of the breakers of law. Nevertheless, we shall assume that Locke believes Socrates to have been unjustly condemned to death.) Locke would agree with Crito, not for the same reason as Crito, but he would agree that Socrates ought to leave Athens because the social contract has been broken. Socrates rather considers himself to have benefited from the Law of Athens. The Laws of Athens have raised him, and therefore he owes them some positive duty to obey them. It would be impious to leave Athens.

Locke's vision of relationships does not stop at the political order; it extends to the social or what Locke calls the conjugal realm. Locke's understanding of marriage suggests the ultimate failure of his inability to grasp piety. Marriage is arguably the highest human relationship, and Locke's reduction of it to merely consensual child rearing is a failure to understand objective value that places positive commands on human life. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Let us now turn and examine what Locke himself says about marriage:

Conjugal society is made by a voluntary compact between man and woman; and tho' it consist chiefly in such a communion and right in one another's bodies as is necessary to its chief end, procreation; yet it draws with it mutual support and assistance, and a communion of interests too, as necessary not only to unite their care and affection, but also necessary to their common off-spring, who have a

right to be nourished, and maintained by them, till they are able to provide for themselves..⁸²

Locke's view of marriage is teleological. His views on marriage turn on the primary purpose of marriage, which he considers to be, not merely procreation, but child raising. The point of marriage is the continuation of the human species; therefore, it is not enough for a wife to conceive and give birth, but child must be raised until it can take care of him or herself. This is a duty which is placed on not only the mother, but also the father. It is one of the few positive commands of natural law: fathers have an obligation to care for those whom they have fathered.⁸³ It is this common purpose that keeps the husband and wife united. But after the purpose of the union has been fulfilled, after children have been raised to adulthood, is there any reason that the marital bond should continue between man and wife? Locke himself comes to the same question,

Why this *compact*, where procreation and education are secured, and inheritance taken care for, may not be made determinable, either by consent, or at a certain time, or upon certain conditions, as well as any other voluntary compacts, there being no necessity in the nature of the thing, nor to the ends of it, that it should always be for life; I mean, to such as are under no restraint of any positive law, which ordains all such contracts to be perpetual..⁸⁴

Locke's view of marriage is essentially a business contract. Two persons, by their own free assent, go about an agreed upon end, and remain with each other until their end has

⁸² Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* 43 Chapter 7 S78

⁸³ Ibid, 43 – 44 Chapter 7 S80

⁸⁴ Ibid, 44 Chapter 7 S81

been achieved. One does not have to be a soft-headed, tender-hearted romantic to notice that Locke makes very little mention of love and affection between husband and wife.

When he does mention affection, mutual interest is a necessary condition for the union of their “care and affection”⁸⁵ The mutual support and assistance present in marriage, while beneficial to both partners, is primarily directed toward the raising of children in Locke’s view. It is at least possible, that under Locke’s idea of marriage, a man and wife could marry one another, bear, and raise children, and never have any affection toward one another.

It seems possible to imagine a Lockean marriage that is really actually like a business partnership rather than something intimate. We can imagine a business partnership where the partners become close friends that care deeply for each other, but also one where no deeper friendship forms. Locke may object that it is never the case that there is ever a marriage where a deeper love does not form, but nevertheless it remains possible.⁸⁶ Not only does it remain possible for a marriage without affection to exist, but in the Lockean view such a marriage could equally be considered as successful as a marriage with affection between man and wife.

I contend there is something wrong here in Locke’s account. We should be unsettled by the idea of a husband and wife raising children together and then separating as soon as their children are grown. We should be unsettled by the idea of a marriage

⁸⁵Ibid, 43 Chapter 7 S78

⁸⁶ As a note I feel that I should mention that there certainly seem to be marriages where the love has “gone cold”. The persons married to one another do not feel any hatred toward one another, in fact they might get along quite well, but neither do they feel any tender affection for one another. They live together like strangers who happen to have known each other for quite some time. They can be in a room together and be worlds apart.

without affection between man and wife being considered a success because they have raised their children to adulthood and secured an inheritance for their children.⁸⁷ Now there is a difference between what is moral and what the laws of the state can govern and protect. We personally may disapprove of a callous marriage but there is no reason the state should under the Lockean vision of the state. This part of morality should be enforced by other faculties. I believe that while that distinction is appropriate that Locke's view of marriage nevertheless suggests an account of human nature and relationships that is incorrect. It may be appropriate to only interact with the state on the grounds of self-interest, but it is far from obvious that this universally applies to human relations.

Locke's view of marriage highlights how he thinks about human relationships. In the Lockean view human persons are all fundamentally free, rational, equal, and independent of each other. The legitimacy of our relationships is conferred by consent, our free consent, for if it is not by free consent then it is a violation of the natural law. Humans also enter relationships for their own good. Locke, like Hobbes, reduces good and evil to pain and pleasure. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke says, "Things then are good or evil, only in reference to pleasure or pain. That we call good, which is apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us; or else to procure or preserve us the possession of any other good or absence of evil. And on the contrary, we name that evil, which is apt to produce or increase any pain, or deprive is of any

⁸⁷ We should also ask what Locke makes of couples that cannot bear children? Does the compact, if not made for life, hold when the purpose of childbearing has been foiled? Can a husband rightfully divorce his wife if she is barren? Can a wife divorce her husband for not being fecund? I think Locke would have to allow divorce on the grounds of inability to bear children.

good.”⁸⁸ Our relationships fall under these two criteria of free consent and being directed towards our pleasure. We enter them for the increase of our pleasure, and they are legitimate only by consent. In the case of government, it is for the pleasure that will come from the protection of our rights to life, liberty, and property. In the case of marriage, it is the pleasure of raising children. In the Lockean view, persons are united by shared interests or goals aimed at the increase of pleasure. All human relationships are reducible to contracts, and contracts that do not violate each person’s rights to life, liberty, and property. If the pursuit of the ends is reached or the relationship ceases to be useful for attaining those ends then the relationship can be terminated, if the compact will allow. The Lockean view is a form of hedonism. These elements are present in Locke’s view of marriage, and if they apply to that most serious relationship, how much more do they apply to other relationships? Deneen says, “If this encompassing logic of choice applies to the most elemental family relationships, then it applies all the more to the looser ties that bind people to other institutions and associations, in which memberships are subject to constant monitoring and assessment of whether it benefits or unduly burdens any person’s individual rights.”⁸⁹ Locke’s vision is appealing, and deeply flattering. The philosopher David Bradshaw rightly notes the appeal of the Lockean vision, and the little mention of positive commitments, which is part of the appeal. He says, “It tells me that I am free, independent, and the equal of all others in my fundamental rights and dignity. My freedom means that I am subject to no positive obligations other than those that I choose to take on, and that I can in principle walk away from almost any commitment.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York, NY: Dover Publications Inc, 1984), 303 Book 2 Chapter 20 S2

⁸⁹ Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 33

⁹⁰ Bradshaw, David. “Passion’s Republic”. *Touchstone*, September/October 2017

It is simply not the case, however, that all are relationships are conferred by our consent apart from positive obligation. It is unfair to Locke to condemn him for completely rejecting positive duties, because he does make mention of them, and even puts them under natural moral law, which is rational. (Now how others interpret Locke and how they apply what he says is not something for which we can condemn Locke. Someone may think, as Deneen does, that for Locke every relationship falls under the logic of self-interest and choice, but he cannot blame Locke for that misinterpretation.)

Before continuing, it is worth noting the tension between Locke's hedonistic view of good and evil and his natural law. Locke does not appear to consistently hold either position. In addition to saying that good and evil are reducible to pain and pleasure, Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* also says,

Morally Good and Evil then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good and Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker; which Good and Evil, Pleasure or Pain, attending our observance or breach of the law, by the Decree of the Law-maker, is that we call *Reward or Punishment*.⁹¹

It would seem then that right and wrong are determined by God, who is infinitely rational and good. On this view it would seem that human relationships would be subject to positive duties, which human ignore at their own peril. Locke does in some areas follow this line of thinking consistently, notably in the case between parents and children. Parents have an obligation to raise their children and children are

⁹¹ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 474 Book 2 Chapter 28 S5

commanded to honor their mothers and fathers.⁹² But what of relationships between fully rational adults? Are those relationships always subject to the logic of consent and mutual beneficence or are there positive commands?

Locke does not speak at any great length of any positive commands, but his silence does not mean he can be immediately thought to be a pure hedonist. Locke accepts Biblical revelation as giving positive commands, and certainly there are biblical passages which speak of positive duties humans have toward one another. These commands, however, would have to be understood in reference to hedonism. Let us turn to the command from St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." If Locke accepts other biblical commands, it is reasonable that he would also accept this command. The command is crippled, however, by Locke's hedonism. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke defines love. He says, "Anyone reflecting upon the thought he has of the delight which any present or absent thing is apt to produce in him has the idea we call *love*."⁹³ Hatred is defined as the opposite of love; the things people hate are the things which cause them pain. Locke continues about the love and hatred of inanimate things and animate things, and says, "Our Love and hatred of inanimate insensible beings is commonly founded on that pleasure and pain which we receive from their use and application... But hatred or love, to beings capable of happiness or misery, is often the uneasiness of delight which we find in ourselves, arising from a consideration of their very being or happiness."⁹⁴ Locke rightfully notes that our love for animate being is

⁹² Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* 39 Chapter 6 S72

⁹³ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 303 – 304 Book 2 Chapter 20 S4

⁹⁴ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 304 Book 2 Chapter 20 S5

different than our love for inanimate beings. When someone says, “I love my armchair”, he certainly means something different than when he says, “I love my mother”. When he speaks of loving his armchair, he does mean that sitting in his armchair brings him pleasure. Certainly, he cannot mean the same thing when he speaks of loving his mother. Mothers are not things to be used. He probably does mean something like Locke suggests, which he means, “I enjoy the presence of my mother, and the thought her being happy makes me happy”.

The Lockean understanding of Love, however, makes the biblical command for husbands to love their wives shallow. For if Locke is correct, then all Paul is commanding is for husbands to feel good or happy when they are around their wives or when they consider their wives’ happiness. The first problem with this understanding is that it makes obedience to the command almost impossible. No one can will up good feelings. Even if a person could, by his or her will, command good feelings would not this command seem particularly weak? Do we not think that there is something more in a relationship as intimate as marriage than mutual good feelings? It would seem a man under the Lockean understanding could fulfill the command just by sitting around thinking pleasant thoughts about his wife’s happiness, while doing nothing to make his wife happy. Is that actually love? This highlights the ultimate problem with Locke’s account of Love; it is ultimately selfish. Love for another person is dependent on them making someone else feel good. Every “I love you” in Locke is qualified by a “because you make me feel good”. Love comes without qualifications. Pope John Paul II criticizes hedonistic thinking as a barrier to love; he says, “Treating a person as a means to an end,

and an end moreover which in this case is pleasure, the maximization of pleasure, will always stand in the way of love.”⁹⁵

If Locke is a hedonist then his account ultimately fails in the same regards as Hobbes. There is no true interpersonal encounter. Locke has a more sophisticated account, but it suffers because persons in his account do not fully open themselves up to encounter with another person. Lockean persons never fully take their eyes off themselves and gaze into the eyes of another. This is not to say that love comes without any mutual affection and happiness. No one in their right mind could deny the deep love of a good marriage as the source of much happiness on earth, nor could anyone deny the pleasure of having friends. Locke’s description of pleasure at another’s presence or pleasure in considering the happiness of the other hint at aspects of love that later philosophers call the *intentio unitiva* and the *intentio benevolentia* of love.⁹⁶ Locke, to his credit, understands the importance of freedom in relationships, but for the wrong reasons. He falls short of interpersonal encounter, but freedom is essential to true interpersonal encounter. Love must be free. 20th Century phenomenologists such as Karol Wojtyla and Dietrich von Hildebrand speak of love as being the free gift of one’s self to the other. They would agree that if each man owns anything then he certainly owns himself, and no one should trespass against his status as a free person. They, however, believe there are higher values that demand proper responses. While not harming anyone in their life, liberty, or property is a good starting place, the recognition of other persons as beings who live out of their interiority, are unrepeatable, and are of infinite dignity, calls for

⁹⁵ John Paul II *Love and Responsibility* (United States: Ignatius Press, 1993), 40

⁹⁶ Von Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, Dietrich Von Hildebrand Legacy Project, 2017), 76

positive action. It calls for love. I believe that Locke has the tools in his metaphysic to get this position, if he rejects hedonism and bases morality fundamentally on reason. This will serve to bring out positive commands, and counter the concerns that Locke creates a world of loose relationships subject to the logic of choice and self-interest.

Chapter 3: Rousseau

Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau can all be lumped together as social contract theorists. Rousseau, however, is the odd man out in this group of three. He uses ideas such as the state of nature, and social contracts, but it is immediately obvious to anyone who reads *The Second Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* that Rousseau is working from completely different premises. The most obvious difference between Rousseau and Locke and Hobbes is his characterization of the state of nature and the origins of the political order. Locke and Hobbes both view the formation of civil political society as a positive good. Man moves from the disorder of the state of nature to the order of civil society. This movement from chaos to order facilitates the growth of human arts and makes possible more complex economic markets because each person's life and property has been made secure for safe use and development. Rousseau, however, thinks that Locke and Hobbes have made an error in their understanding of the state of nature; in fact, according to Rousseau, they have got everything backwards. The character traits that Locke and Hobbes have ascribed to men in the state of nature are the characteristics of men in civil society. "All of them, finally, speaking continually of need, avarice, oppression, desires, and pride, have carried over to the state of Nature they have acquired in society: they spoke about savage man and they

described Civil man.”, laments Rousseau.⁹⁷ It is the life of man in civil society which is nasty and brutish. The Rousseauian state of nature is a romantic paradise, where a man can sit down at the trunk of an oak tree by a stream and finds all his needs satisfied. He drinks from the stream, eats the acorns of the oak tree, and sleeps under the cool shade of the branches.⁹⁸ Rousseau presents an entirely different conception of human nature than Locke or Hobbes. Rousseau’s man is naturally good, and his desires are naturally ordinate and lead him to peace and harmony with his fellow creatures. It is not until society arises that unnatural competitive desires lead man into conflict with his fellow man.

Rousseau begins his account of the state of nature with a physical description of humans in the state of nature, something which neither Locke nor Hobbes take up in their own accounts. (One almost gets the picture of Locke and Hobbes conceiving natural man as a 16th or 17th century Englishman dropped in the middle of the forest and left to fend for himself). Rousseau’s natural man is adapted to the harshness of surviving on his own in the wilderness; he develops a “robust and almost unalterable physique”.⁹⁹ His body is the only tool he knows, and he becomes skilled in his use of it. Natural man is more animalistic; he lives like an animal and his body reflects this animalistic lifestyle. Rousseau contrasts natural man with civilized man who has the advantages of technology, but this has made him softer and less skilled in the use of his own body. Civilized man could easily overwhelm natural man with tools, but if natural man was

⁹⁷ Rousseau, Jean – Jacques. *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse), Polemics, and Political Economy (Collected Writings of Rousseau)*. Trans. by Judith R. Bush, Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly, and Terence Marshall. Ed. by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly. (London: Dartmouth College Press, 1993), 19

⁹⁸ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, 20

⁹⁹ Ibid, 21

pitted against civilized man in face to face, hand to hand combat then the fight, according to Rousseau, would be “an even more unequal fight” than natural man against the technology of civilized man.¹⁰⁰ It seems like an odd place to begin for what does physique matter to origins of inequality? Locke or Hobbes could make comments in *Leviathan* or *The Second Treatise on Government* about how men in the state of nature were stronger and faster compared to men in society, and it would not change their arguments about the origins of the state. For Rousseau, however this is an important part of his account. He is writing the “correct” account of the state of nature; he is writing against the arguments of other state of nature theorist who argue the state of nature is one of unchecked desire, competition, and violence. In particular, he is writing against Hobbes, who he names directly.¹⁰¹ The Hobbesian account, as we have seen, conceives man as fundamentally animalistic, and his unchecked desire is part of what leads to the unending conflict in the state of nature. Rousseau agrees that man in the state of nature is animalistic, but that is not the problem.

An animal’s concern is its own self-preservation, the satisfaction of its physical needs. When it engages violently, it does so for the purposes of hunting or self-defense. Defense need not take the form of physical violence. Often the best defense strategy is to run away, and Rousseau points out man has a natural advantage in being able to run and climb trees in order to escape danger.¹⁰² Rousseau contends natural man is just like the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 21

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 21 Rousseau says, “Hobbes claims that man is naturally intrepid and seeks only to attack and fight. An illustrious Philosopher thinks, on the contrary, and Cumberland and Pufendorf also affirm, that nothing is so timid as man in the state of Nature, and that he is always trembling and ready to flee at the slightest noise he hears, at the slightest movement he perceives.” The illustrious philosopher Rousseau refers to here is Montesquieu.

¹⁰² Ibid, 22

animals, “His self-perseveration being almost his only care, his best trained faculties must be those having as principal object attack or defense, either to subjugate his prey or to save himself from being the prey of another animal.”¹⁰³ The human machine is just like the animal machine, which possesses a great capacity to revitalize itself and guarantee itself.¹⁰⁴

There is for Rousseau, however, an important distinction between man and animal. The animals are entirely operated by Nature, by their instinct alone. Humans do have instincts, but they can choose to accept or reject their instincts by acts of freedom. “Nature commands every animal, and the Beast obeys. Man feels the same impetus, but he realizes he is free to acquiesce or resist.”, says Rousseau.¹⁰⁵ Man also has another experience which sets him apart from the animals. Man is aware of himself; he is self-conscious. Rousseau speaks of this in his discussion of man as a free being. Man is aware of his capacity to sanction or disavow his own instinctual impulses. Man experiences himself as a free creature. The “consciousness of this freedom”¹⁰⁶ also reveals the spiritual side of man. Rousseau rejects Hobbes’ materialism and embraces a view of man as something more than material which is subject to the determinism of chains of causation. The “power of willing, or rather of choosing” are beyond the explanation of the realm of “the Laws of Mechanics”¹⁰⁷ One might expect Rousseau to speak highly of this human capacity Rousseau calls self-perfectibility, which involves a self-consciousness, but he is troubled by it. He says,

¹⁰³ Ibid, 25

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 25

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 25

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 26

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 26

It would be sad for us to be forced to agree that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty is the source of all man's misfortunes; that it is this faculty which, by dint of time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would pass tranquil and innocent days; that it is this faculty which, bringing to flower over the centuries his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues, in the long run makes him the tyrant of himself and of Nature.¹⁰⁸

Man's self-perfectibility ultimately will be the cause of all the vices and evils. In society man's awareness of himself in relationship to others, and the awareness of inequality between him and others will cause jealousy, hatred, violence, and oppression among men. Society causes the perversion of man's natural desires; it drives them into inordinate lusts. Rousseau's account specifically contrasts the inordinacy of the desires of man in society with the properness of man's desires in the state of nature. Rousseau's natural man is ruled purely by instinct. Man lives like an animal, but in a reversal of the Classical and Scholastic traditions, Rousseau believes this to be a good thing. He reverses the roles of the Passion and reason in the life of humans.

While the Classical and Scholastic thinkers thought Reason ought to rule over the desires and bring them into conformity with the rational structure of the universe, Rousseau thinks the passion ought to rule over reason, and it is by the action of the passion that reason is made perfect. He states,

Whatever the Moralists may say about it, human understanding owes much to the Passion, which by common agreement also owe much to it. It is by their activity

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 26

that our reason is perfected; we seek to know only because we desire to have pleasure; and it is impossible to conceive why one who neither desires nor fears would go through the trouble of reasoning.¹⁰⁹

Rousseau lacks any concern that desires might become inordinate on their own; rather he accepts without question man's natural goodness. He begins with the idea that the formation of civil society is the origin of all man's problems, and reasons backwards to believe man alone in nature lives in bliss, and with completely satisfied desires. "His desires do not exceed his Physical needs, the only good he knows in the Universe are nourishment, a female, and repose; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger."¹¹⁰ Rousseau's savage man lives in this simple world and with a simple mind. He lives alone and isolated, driven by his natural passions.

He does not even develop the capacity for language, because he is not in need of communicating with other men. All he has is the universal language of the cry of nature, which arises instinctually in "pressing emergencies"¹¹¹. Language is not even necessary for the rare sexual encounter. "Males and females unite fortuitously, depending on encounter, occasion, and desire, without speech", Rousseau explains.¹¹² The encounters are wordless, ethereal, and occur with ease. Males and females come together, have sexual intercourse and then depart with the same amount of ease as they came together.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 27

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 27 Someone may object to Rousseau's apparent reduction of women to the same level of goods as food and sleep. I do not think it would be fair to condemn Rousseau as a male chauvinist solely because he writes this passage from a male prospective. The sentence can easily be changed to read "the only good she knows in the Universe are nourishment, a male, and repose". I do not intend to pardon Rousseau completely of sexism, but only to point that this comment alone is not enough to prove Rousseau's chauvinism.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 31

¹¹² Ibid, 30

Afterwards, men and women rarely see one another again. If the woman gets pregnant from one of these encounters, then she carries the child until the offspring are strong enough to seek food on their own and promptly leaves them to fend for themselves.

Rousseau rejects Aristotle's idea that man is a ζῷον πολιτικόν (*politikon zoon* or political animal) or a fundamentally social being. Rousseau's savage is fundamentally not a creature that lives in community with other human beings. Primitive man would not need another human being any more than a monkey would need a wolf. The asocial nature of natural man is important to Rousseau's understanding of morality. Savage man does not have complex notions of morality, because that requires a use of reason which is beyond the extent of the passions. He does not think in terms of good and evil; he only knows his basic impulses. (He lacks a conception of goodness and conversely lacks an idea of evil.) One might think that the following of instincts, which are often directed at one's own self-preservation, would lead to selfish and vicious conduct between men. One might also think that this situation will become even worse when men lack a shared conception of good and evil. Indeed, this is what Hobbes thinks will necessarily happen in the state of nature. Rousseau, however, asserts exactly the opposite and once again disagrees with Hobbes by name. He says, "Above all, let us not conclude with Hobbes that because man has no idea of goodness, he is naturally evil."¹¹³ In Rousseau's account there is no tension between the desire for self-preservation led by instincts and the preservation of others. He says, "The state of Nature is that in which care of our self-preservation is the least prejudicial to the self-preservation of others, that state was

¹¹³ Ibid, 35

consequently the best suited to Peace and the most appropriate of the Human Race.”¹¹⁴

What grounds this bold claim of Rousseau? What can induce men to be at peace with one another if they are all following their instincts? There are two reasons why Rousseauian savages live at peace with one another.

The first is because their passions have not been driven to maddening lusts by society. They remain naturally ordinate, and never exceed their physical needs. This, however, might be enough to cause violence between people in the state of nature. There is a limited number of resources in the state of nature, and conflict may come when there is simply not enough food to fulfil the ordinate hunger of two persons.

What could be the other cause of peace between men in the state of nature? It cannot be moral reasoning. Natural savage man does not have any conception of goodness; he cannot appeal to it when determining how to act. In fact, it cannot be complex reasoning that acts independently of a passion, it must be a natural feeling which drives men to care for one another. Rousseau believes this feeling to be pity. He says, “I speak of Pity, a disposition that is appropriate to beings as weak and subject to as many ills as we are; a virtue all the more universal and useful to man because it precedes in him the use of all reflection; and so Natural that even Beasts sometimes give perceptible signs of it.”¹¹⁵

Pity draws a person out of him or herself and toward another. Pity is repulsed by the existence of suffering. Pity tempers the natural desire for self-preservation, and makes men and women willing to help those who are not themselves. The opposite of pity is

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 35

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 36

what Rousseau calls “amour-propre”. Amour-propre is sometimes translated as self-love or pride. It is best understood in contrast to Rousseau’s understanding of pity. Pity is a naturally occurring sympathetic co-misery; it is so natural and ingrained in not only human experience, but animal experience. It is difficult for animals to be around other animals who are suffering or dying. If anyone has ever owned a dog or cat, then they may have had the experience of their pet not leaving their side when they are sick or in pain. I believe Rousseau has something like this in mind when he speaks about animals having pity.

Human pity functions in a similar way. He contends that if someone sees another, especially a weaker human being, like a child, suffering then that person by nature feels compelled to help them, and he himself suffers if he is unable to bring comfort. He almost feels their pain with them. There are some people who cannot even bear to witness another human being experience pain and will turn away and grimace if they watch another person suffer. Some particularly squeamish people might even experience a similar discomfort at the thought of someone suffering intensely. Pity could be defined as, “the instinctual sentiment that desires for another to not suffer”. Rousseau thinks pity is the ultimate foundation of benevolence and friendship. Both are produced by constant pity focused on another person because benevolence and friendship desire for another to be happy. Rousseau rhetorically asks, “Is desiring that someone not suffer anything but desiring that he be happy?”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 37

Amour-propre is the opposite of pity. While pity moves someone outward, and is focused on the Other, amour-propre is self-focused. Sometimes it is translated as vanity. It is a concern with oneself and one's own wellbeing beyond what is natural. In particular, it is the cause of rivalry and hatred in civil society, because amour-propre desires the attention and praise of others. Pity moves men toward one another; amour-propre drives them apart. In keeping with being the opposite of pity, amour-propre does not arise from natural instincts, but from the use of reason. "Reason engenders amour-propre and reflection fortifies it; reason turns man back upon himself, it separates him from all that bothers and afflicts him. Philosophy isolates him.", declares Rousseau.¹¹⁷ Savage man cannot resist the natural flow of his instincts; he lacks the reasoning capacity to act in such a manner. The cries of the weak and innocent, the moaning of suffering men, cannot be ignored by savage man. It takes a man with reason to argue his way into a position where he can justify his own inaction. Philosophy and reason make it possible for man to hear the cries of a suffering man and yet says: "Perish if you will, I am safe."¹¹⁸ Rousseau, in his typical romantic and dramatic fashion, criticizes the philosopher with particularly biting words,

No longer can anything except dangers to the entire society trouble the tranquil sleep of the Philosopher and tear him from his bed. His fellow can be murdered with impunity right under his window; he has only to put his hands over his ears

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 37 – I hope the irony of Rousseau's words are not lost on him in this passage. He himself is of course a philosopher, and I would contend that his theories are isolating. He himself also speaks at length of pity, and of how one cannot naturally resist a child in suffering, but I always find Rousseau's words here to be tinged with either a twisted irony or blind ignorance of his own life. I wonder what he would say of his abandonment of his own children. I remark on this not to throw Rousseau's theories out without consideration by an unfair *ad hominem* attack, but I wonder how seriously he took his own ideas.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 37

and argue with himself a bit to prevent Nature, which revolts within him, from identifying him with the man who is being assassinated. Savage man does not have this admirable talent, and for want of wisdom and reason he is always heedlessly yielding to the first feeling of humanity.¹¹⁹

Rousseau's sarcasm is apparent, and he accuses the philosopher of being less humane, less attuned to what it truly means to be a human, than savage man who lacks reason and wisdom. Rationality and free will are often the unique aspects of humans that philosophers praise. Locke's account of the origin of civil society and government is built on the ideas of humans being rational and free. These are good things to Locke, and civil society should preserve and protect these fundamental aspects of humanity. Rousseau, however, is troubled by reason and freedom. They are the source of all of man's troubles; it is man's freedom and rationality which allow him to not follow his natural instincts alone, and thus lead him to the corruption of civil society. Pity is replaced by amour-propre when reason and free will overthrow man's obedience to natural instincts alone, and the world is made worse.

There is one more idea that is key to understanding the construction of civil society is Rousseau, and it is inequality. It should not be surprising that a book named, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, discusses inequality. In the second paragraph of the work, Rousseau lays out what he means by inequality. He draws a distinction between two type of inequality.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 37

I conceive of two sorts of inequality in the human Species: one, which I call natural or Physical, because it is established by Nature and consists in the difference of ages, health, Bodily strengths, and qualities of Mind or Soul; the other, which may be called moral or Political inequality, because it depends upon a sort of convention and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of Men. The latter consist in different privileges that some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as to be richer, more honored, more Powerful, than they, or even to make themselves obeyed by them.¹²⁰

It is a long passage, but one worth quoting at length because it is important to Rousseau's understanding of man and his understanding of civil society. Like Locke and Hobbes, Rousseau acknowledges there is natural inequality, which is to say nothing more than everyone has different natural gifts and talents. Some people are by nature more athletic or have a higher capacity for abstract thinking than others. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau does not think that this equality is a problem in the state of nature. Men are isolated from one another, and even if they happen to come into contact with one another, and the stronger drives away the weaker, then the weaker can easily move away to another place where he will be able to fulfil his needs. When everyone's needs are fulfilled by the ease of natural life then the only benefits of natural gifting is to gain the praise and favor of others, but when there is no society of people, who can give praise or favor, then it is of no advantage.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 37

After establishing the natural goodness, freedom, and natural inequality of man, Rousseau begins his central argument of *The Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*. Rousseau argues that society creates institutional or moral inequality, and inequality leads to corruption of man's natural goodness by inflaming unnatural desires which drive greed and competition between man. He begins the second part of *The Second Discourse* by saying,

The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human Race have been spared by some who, uprooting the stakes or filling the ditch, had shouted to his fellows: Beware of listening to this imposter; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the Earth to no one!¹²¹

Property is an important part of understanding the corruption of civil society, as it creates the potential for institutionalized inequality, which causes man's horrors. In Rousseau's conjecture, property does not come about instantly, nor does civil society. Savage men slowly learn that they can unite around common interest and live in small herds. These groups last if mutual interest binds them and dissolves as soon as interests are no longer mutual. Civil society truly starts when men and women begin to live together, as sexual partners in a place that can sustain them. There was not yet agriculture, but men and women grew accustomed to not wandering far and gathering what they needed from nearby. As families grew and other humans settled around, small happy communities

¹²¹ Ibid, 37

began to form. In these communities corruption began, and it began in the sexual realm, particularly among young men. As is to be expected young men and women were drawn together into sexual relationships. By living together, people had more options for sexual partners than savage man, who might only come across a woman once in his life. The young men and women began to compare possible partners to other possible partners. “People grow accustomed to consider different objects and make comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and beauty which produce sentiments of preference”, notes Rousseau.¹²² This became the root of conflict, for these judgements and frequent interactions stirred up the desire not only to see someone, but see them again and again. Competition over sexual partners soon began among the young, and “Jealousy awakens with love.”¹²³ This is the beginnings of amour-propre, of self-interested egoistic concern for oneself. In this particular case it is concern for one’s own desirability in the sexual domain.

Anyone who has ever tried to romance someone knows what Rousseau is talking about. The young man who previously wore ill-fitting sweatpants and t-shirts, rarely brushed his hair, and shaved once a month, is shook from his comfortable indifference by a young lady. Suddenly, he does not fail to adopt the latest fashions, and to always comb and style his, and keep his face clean shaven. Unfortunately, jealousy and fights between rivals for the affection of another are also woefully well known to all.

Amour-propre grows up in these small societies in another way. The people of these small communities gathered together and amused themselves. In these gatherings

¹²² Ibid, 47

¹²³ Ibid, 47

people began to enjoy the attention and praise of their neighbors and began to compare themselves to one another. Rousseau says, “Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered.”¹²⁴ Each person turned to look at himself and his own positive qualities, and desired the praise of other men and felt that praise is his right. These preferences of public opinion pushed people away from innocence and towards vice; feelings such as shame envy, contempt, vanity began to leaven the human mind.

This was the beginning of corruption of society; however, full corruption did not begin until man combined his fledgling feelings of amour-propre with the violation of his natural needs. “As soon as they observed that it was useful for a single person to have provision for two, equality disappeared.”, says Rousseau.¹²⁵ This realization turned man away from his natural instincts, which never exceed his physical needs, and man desired to collect more than he needed. From this desire, the invention of agriculture came, and forests were transformed into fields by the sweat of man. Property arose out of this labor because when a man put his labor into something, he then considered it to be his, and whatever comes from it also his. Things might not have deteriorated from this point, if everything had remained equal, but “the stronger did more work” and “the clever turned his to better advantage”.¹²⁶ The natural inequality of man makes itself manifest in the institutional inequality of property.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 47

¹²⁵ Ibid, 49

¹²⁶ Ibid, 51

Amour-propre set each man to be interested in his own wellbeing and compete with others in trying to gain the objects of their desires. Men saw natural gifts such as strength, cleverness, beauty, or skill are beneficial to gaining what they wanted. They soon discovered that if one can appear to possess those qualities then it was enough to gain what they wanted, and so men became inclined to practice deceit. Others found it is enough to bully others and took what they wanted by force. Thus, corruption and vices entered society. “Finally, consuming ambition, the fervor to raise one’s relative fortune less out of genuine need than to place oneself above others inspires in all men a base inclination to harm each other... All these evils are the first effect of property and the inseparable consequence of nascent inequality.”, concludes Rousseau.¹²⁷ Some men were more successful than others at gaining wealth, and moral inequality grew worse. The gap between the rich and poor widened. The rich exploited the weakness and needs of the poor to gain more wealth, and the poor lusted after the status and possessions of the rich. Man descended into a state of war, like what Hobbes describes. It was a brutal competition for resources, where raw desire violently clashed with the raw desires of others.

As the brutality continued, the rich realized they could not continue in such a state. They were subjected to constant robberies and attacks from those who desire their wealth. Vastly outnumbered, they came together for the most insidious deception yet. Rousseau describes the plot, “The rich, pressed by necessity, finally conceived the most deliberate project that ever entered the human mind. It was to use in his favor the very forces of those who attacked him, to make his defenders out of his adversaries, inspire

¹²⁷ Ibid, 52

them with other maxims, and give them other institutions which were as favorable to him as natural Right was adverse.”¹²⁸ The rich went to the poor and proposed to institute civil government, saying,

Let us unite... to protect the weak from oppression, restrain the ambitious, and secure for everyone the possession of what belongs to him. Let us institute regulations of Justice and peace to which all are obliged to conform, which man an exception of no one, and which will compensate in some way for the caprices of fortune by equally subjecting the powerful and the weak to mutual duties.¹²⁹

Little did the poor know that the promise of freedom was really the chains of oppression of the rich. The poor did not foresee that the institutions, which promised to protect them, would actually be the tools of the rich and powerful to exploit the less fortunate. The people who did see the abuses and oppression which would rise from the formation of government planned to benefit from it, and freely joined in hopes of bettering themselves. “Such was, or must have been, the origin of Society and Laws, which gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich, destroyed natural freedom for all time, established forever the Law of property and inequality... and for the profit of a few ambitious men henceforth subjected the whole human race to work, servitude, and misery.”, concludes Rousseau.¹³⁰

The ills of society as described in *The Second Discourse*, Rousseau attempts to solve in *The Social Contract*. His goal is to reconcile freedom and authority. If

¹²⁸ Ibid, 52

¹²⁹ Ibid, 52

¹³⁰ Ibid, 52

government is a lie of the rich in *The Second Discourse*, then in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau seeks to set up a government where they rich keep their promise. Government really will secure the freedom, property, and rights of individuals.

Rousseau's solution is the General Will. Like Hobbes Rousseau's idea for government is joint submission to a singular will, he says, "If, therefore, one eliminates from the social compact whatever is not essential to it, one will find that it is reducible to the following terms. *Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.*"¹³¹ The price of the social contract is the natural freedom to do whatever one wills, but in return he gains civil liberty and property. (Rousseau also briefly mentions man gaining "moral liberty" in society which "alone makes him truly master of himself", but he quickly moves on and does not flesh out this seemingly off-hand remark.¹³²) The benefits of property are possessing things but also having "positive title" to things.¹³³ Civil liberty is also gained and it is not much different than natural liberty, except it is limited by the General Will.

I have compared Rousseau's idea of submission to the General Will to Hobbes' idea of the Sovereign, and while Rousseau does call the exercise of the General Will, sovereignty, it improper to think that Hobbes and Rousseau espouse the same political philosophy. One might object that both Rousseau's General Will and Hobbes' Sovereign rule for the common good. While this true, Rousseau's concept of the common good is

¹³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Trans. by Donald A. Cress, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), Book 1 Chapter 6, 24

¹³² Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 1 Section 8, 27

¹³³ Ibid

more expansive than the role of Hobbesian Sovereign, who primarily ensures the common good of peace.

The best contrast between Hobbes and Rousseau is how their respective Sovereigns order society. Hobbes' Sovereign creates radically unequal hierarchy where one man stands above the law because his will is the law. Everyone is below the Hobbesian Sovereign and is free to order themselves as they see fit (as long as there is not a command from the Sovereign about socio-economic-classes). Hobbes is not concerned with inequality; in fact, it is apparently necessary in order to have peace. Rousseau, as we have seen, sees inequality and its origins as the sources of a great many evils.

It should not be surprising that when Rousseau speaks about the General Will he has in mind that it wills toward equality among citizens.¹³⁴ One of the great problems of society is the corruption of private wills acting for their good only. The General Will stands in opposition to this trend and always works for the public good, which is common to all citizens of the state. The General Will is a rational return to pity. There are two lengthier passages from Rousseau, that hint at such an interpretation. In Book 1 Chapter 8 Rousseau says,

This passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces quite a remarkable change in man, for it substitutes justice for instinct in his behavior and gives his actions a moral quality they previously lacked. Only then, when the voice of duty replaces physical impulse and right replaces appetite, does man, who hitherto

¹³⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 2 Chapter 1, 29

taken only himself into account, find himself to act upon other principles and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations.¹³⁵

This calls us back to one of the distinguishing features of humanity Rousseau mentions in *The Second Discourse*, the capacity for free will, which allows humans to reject the impulse of instinct. Amour-propre influences the use of reason to turn people away from their instinct of pity and beings the cycle of selfishness which dooms civilization. In this passage though, the abstract idea of justice, which must be derived from reason, now replaces instinct and brings people together in peace and harmony. Pity as instinct directs human persons to recognize others as beings who do not want to experience pain and ultimately want to live. Justice and submission to the general will are the rational derivatives that serve the same role as the instinct of pity. The second passage that reinforces this idea is in Book 2 Chapter 4 where Rousseau says,

Why is the general will always right, and why do all constantly want the happiness of each of them, if not because everyone applies the word *each* to himself and thinks of himself as he votes for all? This proves that the quality of right and the notion of justice it produces are derived from the preference each person gives himself, and thus from the nature of man.”¹³⁶

What exactly is the General Will? One might expect that is merely the collective will of the people; however, Rousseau is not exactly clear on how the General Will arises. He does make comments that seem to intuitively follow from the mere usage of the words “general” and “will”. In some places the General Will arises from the common

¹³⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 1 Chapter 8, 26-27

¹³⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 2 Chapter 4, 33

will of all the people. He says, “But remove from these same will the pluses and minuses that cancel one another and what remains as the sum of the differences is the general will.”¹³⁷ In other places in *The Social Contract* Rousseau makes comments which suggest the General Will may be more than the combined will of the citizens of the republic. In Book 4 of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau mentions that when people vote on governmental actions the vote is not the same as the General Will. They are rather supposed to vote if they think a proposal is in accord with the General Will; a decision made by a majority is not necessarily identical with the General Will.¹³⁸ The selfish desires of persons could still corrupt the voting process and bring all sorts of evil into society. The General Will, however, is not subject to this same kind of perversion, as it is “always in the right and always works for the public utility”.¹³⁹ Fortunately, the common good is not hard to understand; the only thing needed to understand the common good is good sense.¹⁴⁰ When men are guided by their own private interests corruption of the political order begins and oppression and inequality follow quickly on heels of greed. Rather than complex political systems ruled by greedy bureaucrats, government should be so simple that even the common peasant can participate in them.

Rousseau once again paints a romantic picture of men in such a society, and waxes, “When among the happiest people in the world, bands of peasants are seen regulating their affairs of the state under an oak tree, and always acting wisely, can one help scorning the refinements of other nations, which make themselves illustrious and

¹³⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 2 Chapter 3, 31-32

¹³⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 4 Chapter 2, 82

¹³⁹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 2 Chapter 3, 31

¹⁴⁰ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 4 Chapter 1, 79

miserable with so much art and mystery.”¹⁴¹ The exact nature of the General Will is not definitively settled by Rousseau. It remains very aethereal and imprecise. I think that is best understood as the rational return to pity based on the two passages I mentioned earlier in this work. It is the rational return to the kind of empathic co-suffering wherein one loses a sense of oneself and identifies with the other, from this flows equality and therefore peace and unity.

There is one odd thing that ought to be noted about Rousseau’s theory. One would think that because he is so concerned about oppression that Rousseau would be totally against any coercion from the state. In Book 1, however, he makes odd comments that seem to contradict this spirit. He says in a lengthy passage,

Thus, in order for the social compact to avoid being an empty formula, it tacitly entails the commitment – which alone can give force to the others – that whoever refuses to obey the general will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free. For this is the sort of condition that, by giving each citizen to the homeland, guarantees himself against all personal dependence – a condition that produces the skill and the performance of the political machine, and which alone bestows legitimacy upon civil commitments.

Without it such commitments would be absurd, tyrannical and subject to the worst abuses.¹⁴²

What exactly he means by forcing people to be free is unclear. He seems to imply that people must be forced to follow the General Will for their own good and ultimately for

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Book 1 Chapter 7, 26

their own freedom. There is something nefarious about this, and something which I believe ought to leave the reader unsettled. Totalitarian governments have often claimed to be ruling for the benefits of their citizens, that if everyone will obey them then society will be heaven on earth; it is an attempt to immanentize the eschaton. It is hard not to wonder if Rousseau has drunk of a poison which has caused the death of millions of men. Rousseau does say that the social compact is a non-tyrannical government, but it is worth wondering if the leaders of the U.S.S.R thought themselves to be tyrannical.

Rousseau's account is appealing on the surface. He objects to inequality (financial inequality in particular) and oppression and advocates for a sovereign power, established by democratic voting, which rules for the common good. He believes the problems of society could be solved if people cared less for their own selfish interests and cared more for their fellow man. Rousseau's account is also personally appealing. It tells each person that he or she is naturally good, and that his or her flaws and failings are not their own fault but are caused by society. If I feel any evil impulse at all, according to Rousseau, I am not to blame for it. It is the corruption of society living in me.¹⁴³ Flattery, unfortunately does not ground a philosophical account. Can Rousseau's account be criticized?

Deneen's criticisms of Liberalism do not seem to apply to Rousseau like they do to Locke and Hobbes. It is possible Rousseau might agree with Deneen, and insist that his emphasis on pity, and his communitarian approach to society would avoid the calculating consent only view of relationships that Deneen criticizes. It is also hard to see how

¹⁴³ Bradshaw. "Passion's Republic"

Deneen's second anthropological assumption of Liberalism is applicable to Rousseau. If anything, Rousseau laments the conquest of nature as one of the origins of society and its subsequent evils.¹⁴⁴ (I will say more about Deneen's second anthropological assumption of Liberalism later).

Rousseau may reject the idea that calculated mutual interests are the basis of all human relationships, including the civic political relationship. (This is not clear to me as one of Rousseau's descriptions of the General Will seems to suggest the common good is found through mutual interests, but for the sake of the argument I will grant that Rousseau rejects this view.) Deneen, however, is concerned about individualism. Liberalism emphasizes the independence, autonomy, and relational separateness of persons too much. Deneen is not so bold to deny that there are individual persons in the world; he is not a pantheist. I am sure he would hold the idea from Roman law *persona est sui iuris et alteri incommunicabilis*. Deneen is better understood as thinking human persons are ζῷον πολιτικόν (political animals). Human persons are the kind of things that are social by their nature and thrive when they are in relationships with other human persons. It is hard to determine if Rousseau rejects this understanding of humans as social creatures. If his account of nature is taken seriously then it does certainly seem that he thinks humans are not by nature social, but rather isolated. In his state of nature, it is rare for another human being to ever encounter another human being. Rousseau thinks this is for the best. The state of nature starts to come to an end when men and women begin to live with one another in sexual intimacy. The full corruption of human beings starts when persons live in community with one another. In his notes at the end of *The Second*

¹⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 26

Discourse Rousseau says, “Let human Society be as highly admired as one wants; it is nonetheless true that it necessarily brings men to hate each other in proportion to the conflict of their interests, to render each other apparent services and in fact do every imaginable harm to one another.”¹⁴⁵ Rousseau might have agreed with Jean-Paul Sartre that hell was the others. Maybe men would be better to destroy society and return to the woods. Perhaps we ought to go back to living alone and the idyllic times of gathering acorns and sleeping under that same oak tree. Regardless of how one may disagree with Rousseau, he is nevertheless a clever thinker. He anticipates such an objection, “What! Must we destroy Societies, annihilate thine and mine, and go back to live in the forests with Bears? A conclusion in the manner of my adversaries, which I prefer to anticipate rather than leave them the shame of drawing it.”¹⁴⁶ After saying this he once again waxes dramatic and says that if someone feels such a call to return to the forests then they ought to do so, but for men like himself it is too late. He will stay in the bonds of society. He then makes a statement which seems to imply he does think there can be some good which comes from Reason and civil society. He says, “Those, in a word, who are convinced that the divine voice called the whole human Race to the enlightenment and happiness of celestial Intelligences: all those will endeavor, through the exercise of virtues they obligate themselves to practice while learning to know them, to deserve the eternal reward they ought to expect from them; they will respect the sacred bonds of the Societies of which they are members.”¹⁴⁷ It is an odd passage from Rousseau, and it is hard to tell which view he endorses. It is obvious he believes himself to be one of those

¹⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 74

¹⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 79

¹⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 80

who will remain in society to exercise virtue and partake of celestial Intelligence, but is he really advocating people to return to the state of nature if they can? His dramatic poetic tone makes it hard to determine. Given what he argues for in *The Social Contract*, I think it is possible he advocates for both. Most people will hopefully come to live in a society governed by the General Will, but perhaps there are a rare few who will live in the forests, and will have no want of anything but repose, nourishment, and a female.

But does Rousseau believe humans are by nature autonomous and nonrelational? It may be too late for most people to go back; they must make the best of learning to live in society which may always corrupt and oppress them. But is savage man actually nonrelational? He does engage in sexual intercourse, is that not relational? Furthermore, is not the instinct of pity, which he had by his very nature, something which draws him toward other humans? While savage man does engage in sex, the savage man and savage woman do not encounter one another as other persons; they encounter one another as sexual objects. Rousseau's state of nature sex is closer to a one-nightstand than a romantic relationship. The other is not encountered as a You who is also an I; the other is encountered as an It. This is not an interpersonal social relationship, but an animal relationship. According to Rousseau, conjugal society is a source of suffering. When they live together and tender affectivity arises, jealousy and other evils of society shortly follow. Social relations are the origin of amour-propre. This moves away from man as a political animal, and specifically the kind of being which thrives when he is in an interpersonal relationship. Can anyone deny that marriage is the most intimate relationship on Earth? Can anyone also deny that good marriages are the sources of much happiness on Earth? Or even can a person deny that a deep friendship is the source of

much happiness? I think Rousseau would want to deny that by nature this is the case. He may well admit that it happens, but he would say it is unnatural.

What about pity though? Does it constitute man by his instinct as a relational creature? I do not think it does, at least not in the sense of person to person. Rousseau's instinct of pity is not an I-Thou encounter. Pity is as close as Rousseau gets to I-Thou interpersonal encounter in the state of nature, because it does draw a person outside of himself. Pity does recognize the subjectivity of the other, namely as a being who can or is experiencing pain. Pity also recognizes the other as subject insofar as savage man reflects on himself as a subject. How then does pity fall short of I-Thou encounter? Pity falls short because it is not free; it is an animal instinct. Even the animals know of pity, and animals while sentient are not persons. Among other things, they lack the freedom indicative of persons. For Rousseau, man by his nature does have free will, but it is not known to him until he goes through the unnatural process of awakening reason. Interpersonal relationships are necessarily the acting of the freely sanctioned will. Savage man is not yet rational, and he does not yet have the capacity to go against his instincts. His pity and the relationship it draws him into is still, like the sexual encounter, an animal relation. This is also evidenced by the fact that man can pity animals in the same way he can pity other humans. (This also seems to suggest a shallow understanding of the subjectivity of other human persons. The subject nature of human persons qua human person is a deeper, more profound subjectivity than anything an animal can experience.) Rousseau, I think, would allow for a rational return to pity in *The Social Contract*, but again this would be unnatural rather than by nature.

The ultimate proof of savage man as being something nonrelational is that he does not speak. He is an animal and he relates to things qua *animalis*. Speech is a capacity that mediates interpersonal relationship. Speech is fundamental to interpersonal encounter. This is the reason that Buber speaks of addressing, as speaking to the other, as You. Buber call I and You the “basic words”.¹⁴⁸ While humans may learn to speak, it is unnatural for savage man. I believe this part of Rousseau’s metaphysical anthropology must be rejected.

Before we leave Rousseau, there are a few problems with Rousseau’s account of human nature which I believe erroneous and would like to briefly address before ending our discussion of Rousseau. The first point is his belief in the natural goodness of man, and the second point which follows is the ability of man to rely on his instincts as a completely trustworthy guide to action. In his personal notes in *The Second Discourse*, Rousseau explicitly states his belief in the natural goodness of man, “Men are wicked; sad and continual experience spares the need for proof. However, man is naturally good; I believe I have demonstrated it.”¹⁴⁹ Rousseau’s demonstration of man’s natural goodness, I think, consists in the entirety of *The Second Discourse*. It should be noted that this demonstration is questionable because by Rousseau’s own admission, the book is grounded in nothing more than his fertile imagination.¹⁵⁰ He is correct that humans do commit evil. Only an extremely naive person or absolute idiot would deny that humans do evil things. Everyone, if honest with themselves, would have to admit that they have done wrong. History also testifies to the horrors of which humans are capable. The 20th

¹⁴⁸ Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* trans. Walter Kauffman, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 53

¹⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 74

¹⁵⁰ “Let us therefore begin by setting all the facts aside, for they do not affect the question.” Rousseau, *Second Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* 19

Century alone is bloody martyr enough to prove the evil of humanity until the world's end. Equally, however, we must admit that people are capable of great goodness. Amidst the horrors of the 20th Century stand people like Mother Teresa.

“Is goodness or evil natural to man?” is a different question and is not necessarily proved by past good actions or evil actions. One may argue that the prevalence of evil compared to occurrence of saints is testament enough, and they may be correct.

Unfortunately, it will not satisfy men like Rousseau who would blame all the evil on the corrupting influence of society. Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of humans follows from his idea that savage man lives like an animal. He lives following his instincts. Rousseau seems to believe that before society man's instincts were always ordinate, and never exceeded his physical needs. His claim is that instinct is an infallible guide to proper moral action. He, of course, has no proof of this. The state of nature is a myth, a work of fiction. Rousseau blames the ills of man on society, and claims that men before society were peaceful, but he himself does not actually know what men without society is like.

The larger problem with Rousseau's account is his faulty understanding of instincts. Instincts themselves are in competition with one another. Each desire demands to be satisfied over another one; each instinct seems to yell, each with its own voice, and demand complete attention to it. It is often this yelling, this demanding, we experience from our desires that causes us to do something we ought not to have done. Students, who know they need to study for their upcoming test, but nevertheless procrastinate in order to attend a party, have fallen prey to their pleasure-seeking instinctual desire. Often between persons, one person will slight another in order to fulfil their own desire. Someone may

lie in order to get out of a commitment that they now find burdensome. In a trite case, someone may take the last serving of some dessert in order to prevent their roommate from eating it before they can eat it later. A man dying of thirst might kill his friend in order to get a drink of water. This is ultimately the weakness of Rousseau's claim.

Rousseau fails to account for the power of the pleasure seeking and pain avoiding instincts of man. Animals will go to great lengths to avoid pain or get pleasure, and they will do so with little regard for anything else. Rousseau claims this will be moderated by pity, an instinctual regard for the pain of others. But because pity is another instinct it cannot judge between instincts. A judge cannot be a member of the things judged. Pity will cry in its same loud voice as all the other instincts and will only be satisfied if it is the loudest. Unfortunately, this allows us to imagine situations where savage man is more than capable of committing evil and it remain perfectly in line with his instincts. Imagine Rousseau's savage man, alone and isolated living underneath an oak tree. For the first time ever, he encounters a savage woman, and his sexual instinct now calls out to him to procreate. The savage woman, however, does not feel the same way about the about the savage man; her sexual instinct remains quiet. If the savage man completely follows his sexual instinct, then it will lead him to overpower and rape the young woman. To rape someone would surely be horrific and be extremely painful and traumatizing for the victim. As such, savage man's pity instinct would advise him to not harm the young woman, to not inflict pain upon his fellow man. The two instincts cannot both be satisfied for this savage man. They are mutually exclusive. Rousseau claims that pity would win the day here and be stronger than the sexual instinct. If this happens though it is mere chance that his pity instinct is stronger than his sexual instinct. Why could it not be the

case that sexual instinct wins out against the pity instinct and savage man not only commits evil but a horrific act of evil? What guarantee does Rousseau have that pity will always rule over the other instincts? It cannot be that pity rules over and moderates the instincts, for it itself is an instinct. It cannot be a judge over the instincts; something which is not instinctual would have to perform that function. Rousseau may plant his feet and assert pity is the strongest instinct, but I cannot see how he has any way of proving this. It seems to be perfectly consistent that savage man could always follow his instinct and naturally be evil. Either Rousseau must admit that instincts are not an infallible guide to goodness, and thus natural man is not always good, or he must say, in this case, that rape is not morally evil. I fail to see how anyone could not condemn rape, as not only evil, but one of the worst evils. Thus, it seems instinct is not an infallible guide to moral action, and Rousseau's idea about the natural goodness of man must be rejected.

Conclusion: Has Liberalism Failed?

Before offering my final thoughts, I must address something which has been lacking in my paper. The reader may have noticed that I have mentioned two anthropological assumptions of Liberalism based on the work of Patrick Deneen, but only addressed the first anthropological assumption and its application to Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Deneen's concern about Liberalism's rejection of *telos* and the human opposition and separation from the natural world is relevant to all three of these authors. I have not addressed this at length because I feel that to do so would be beyond the current capacity of this paper. It is a complex issue and certainly one that ought to be addressed. I believe that Hobbes' concern with power extends to natural resources. Unsurprisingly, there are Baconian themes in Hobbes when he talks of nature. Locke also sees the natural

world as primarily something to be owned and used by man. Both authors fall prey to Deneen's critique of right leaning Liberalism whose primary vice is greed. This is not to denounce science nor the great achievements of science which have saved many lives and significantly improved millions more. A proper philosophy of science and how it might avoid becoming like magic, another tool to conform the world to man's desires and wishes at the price of his soul, is a discussion beyond the current scope of this paper. How exactly Deneen's critique would apply to Rousseau is more difficult. Rousseau seems to constantly lament the development of science and technology as taking men out of the state of nature and into the corruption of society. There may be other works of Rousseau in which he further develops his ideas regarding man and nature where he falls into Deneen's concerns of both right and left leaning Liberalism. While I personally believe in *telos* and specifically that human persons also possess a *telos*, this paper is not prepared offer a complete defense on its behalf.

Has Liberalism failed? Time alone can tell. America remains a proud bastion of the Liberal tradition, and this paper is not able to comment on (nor is it interested in commenting on) the political problems facing the United States of America. I cannot fully endorse Patrick Deneen's critique of Liberalism. He misses some of the subtlety and nuances of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Nor, however, can I fully endorse the metaphysical anthropologies of Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau. All three men should be credited with some noble ambitions and some truths, but also must be held accountable for their failings. Hobbes recognizes the goodness of peace, and if anything can be taken from Hobbes it must be that civil war is a truly terrible experience and that as long as civilized discussion and legal reform is possible then it is to be preferred to

violence. The rule of law, even unfair law, is better than anarchy and violence. I cannot, however, accept Hobbes' materialism and the Protagorean move which accompanies his materialism. I believe this fails to do justice to human persons as world-open beings capable of I-thou encounter. I believe this ultimately reduces humans to the level of intelligent animals, which lays the groundwork for Hobbes' Mortal God to rule as tyrant by means of violence and terror.

Locke likewise should be praised for his deep concern for the fundamental rights of human persons, and the respect for their individual sovereignty. His rejection of tyranny in favor of the state of nature is a vast improvement over the thinking of Hobbes. His account of relationships also deserves praise for recognizing the importance of freedom. Locke, however, deserves criticism for the utilitarian pleasure seeking that pervades his account of human relationships. It is not immediately obvious that Socrates is incorrect and there is not a pious duty to one's state which is not self-interested. Locke's account of marriage also seems to fall prey to the utilitarian calculus. Locke's account has difficulty providing an account of an unqualified "I love you" which is the truest and deepest of love in words.

Rousseau also must be credited with a real concern about the oppression which can occur in society. It is noble at least that Rousseau wants a society that does not alienate the lower classes, and even the peasants are concerned and participate in the government. Rousseau's account of human nature seems to me rife with problems. His account of the natural goodness of man, which is only ruined by society, is highly skeptical as it is not the case that instincts are an infallible guide to goodness. Listening to instincts is like listening to people; people say lots of different things, and often

contradictory things. Rousseau's account also rejects the understanding of man as a political animal. For Rousseau interpersonal relations are unnatural and corrupt human person's natural goodness. I think this is a most incorrect position as not only do humans thrive in interpersonal relationships, but the closest and most intimate relationships often draw the best out of persons.

Whatever the future brings, the call of truth remains the same. Perhaps a new dark age will come after the fall of Liberalism, and another very different St. Benedict will arise. Perhaps Liberalism will continue for another 200 years. It is abundantly clear to me that whatever the future that the importance of the personhood of individuals must be acknowledged. As we construct society we must keep with man as a being who thrives in I-thou encounter; we must return to our understanding of man as a *ζῷον πολιτικόν*.

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